





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation

2nd  
35t

HISTORY  
OF  
AURICULAR CONFSSION.



**Ex Libris**  
**C. K. OGDEN**

THE  
HISTORY  
OF  
AURICULAR CONFESSION,  
RELIGIOUSLY, MORALLY, AND POLITICALLY CONSIDERED  
AMONG ANCIENT AND MODERN NATIONS.

BY  
COUNT C. P. DE LASTEYRIE.

TRANSLATED UNDER THE AUTHOR'S ESPECIAL SANCTION BY  
CHARLES COCKS, B.L.,

PROFESSOR BREVETE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FRANCE. TRANSLATOR OF  
MICHELET'S "PRIESTS, WOMEN, AND FAMILIES," &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON :  
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET,  
Publisher in ordinary to Her Majesty.  
1848.

**CHAPMAN, ELCOATE, AND COMPANY, 5, SHOE LANE, AND PETERBOROUGH  
COUBT, FLEET STREET.**

BX  
2267  
L3  
v. 1

## CONTENTS.

---

	PAGE
Advertisement . . . . .	ix
Preliminary Observations . . . . .	xii

## BOOK I.

### CONFESSIOIN IN ITS RELATION TO RELIGION.

#### CHAPTER I.

Sin and Penitence among Pagans, Jews, and Mahometans	3
--	---

#### CHAPTER II.

Philosophical and Religious Opinions among different Nations on Confession and the Remission of Sins .	29
--	----

#### CHAPTER III.

Confessions in Use in Different Religions: a continuation of the preceding chapter . . . . .	48
--	----

#### CHAPTER IV.

Confession made to God alone in the Presence of the Faithful; Penance and Forgiveness of Sins among the earlier Christians; Auricular Confession unknown among them . . . . .	65
---	----

#### CHAPTER V.

Reciprocal Confession between Laymen among the Christians; Origin of Sacerdotal and Sacramental Confession . . . . .	90
--	----

## CHAPTER VI.

	PAGE
Change in Ancient Discipline and Penance in consequence of the Corruption of Christianity . . . . .	109

## CHAPTER VII.

Nature and Effects of Auricular and Sacerdotal Confession among Roman Catholics . . . . .	145
---	-----

## CHAPTER VIII.

Progress of Auricular and Sacerdotal Confession among Christians. . . . .	172
---	-----

## CHAPTER IX.

Repentance and Absolution of Sins in the System of Auricular Confession . . . . .	188
---	-----

## BOOK II.

## CONFESSiON IN ITS RELATION TO MORALITY.

## CHAPTER I.

The Doctrine of the Casuists . . . . .	211
--	-----

## CHAPTER II.

The Immorality of the Questions asked in Confession .	228
---	-----

## CHAPTER III.

Seduction of Females in Spain, by Means of Confession	234
---	-----

## ADVERTISEMENT.

---

IN laying this remarkable work before the English reader, the translator conceives it may not be superfluous to indicate the object which the noble author had in view in thus exposing the immoral effects of the system of Catholicism, so conspicuous in the invention and practice of Auricular Confession. To do so, the translator has only to give the following quotation from the present volume :—

“ If to present to the knowledge of the public detestable opinions and principles, be an opprobrium to some persons, it will, on the contrary, be a salutary warning to all, and the only means of putting a stop to causes of depravity, the more dangerous as they are disseminated quietly and under the cloak of religion : it will be a motive for too confiding and over-credulous persons to keep clear of an institution invented for the pur-

pose of subjecting Christians to a shameful and intolerable bondage."

The translator takes this opportunity of expressing to Count de Lasteyrie his grateful acknowledgments for the following obliging favour, by which the author has honoured the present undertaking with his approbation.

" Monsieur,

" J'ai reçu la lettre par laquelle vous me demandez à traduire en Anglais mon Histoire de la Confession . . . Ayant composé cet ouvrage dans le seul but d'attirer l'attention du public sur l'une des institutions les plus funestes imaginées par l'ambition sacrilège des hommes, je verrai avec plaisir que cet ouvrage soit reproduit dans une langue où il pourra acquérir une plus grande publicité, et étendre ainsi le bien que j'ai eu en vue. Je suis d'autant plus aise que vous entreprendiez cette traduction, que le talent dont vous avez donné des preuves en ce genre, est une garantie du succès que vous devez avoir . . .

" J'ai l'honneur d'être, Monsieur,

" Avec dévouement,

" C. DE LASTEYRIE."

## PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

---

HE who writes to oppose errors must expect to find contraditors, and often adversaries, the more violent and irascible that they are more interested in deceiving. There are some, however, who, according to the ideas they have acquired from education and circumstances, condemn, without examination and from prejudice, every opinion that differs from their own. This is a misfortune; yet we cannot blame them when they act conscientiously, and are as tolerant towards others as we ought to be towards them. But, on the other hand, we must rise against those hypocrites, those cheats, who are the eternal enemies of civil and religious liberty. We must despise their criticism, and even their hatred and calumny.

However, such is the character of the human mind, that it is sufficient for an inveterate opinion to be favoured by circumstances and encouraged by the policy of influential men, to hurry away the masses, and become something sacred which it is unlawful to touch.

Fifty years ago, nobody in France, with a few exceptions, ever went to confess: public opinion openly pronounced against this institution. But the empire (of Napoleon) and the other governments which have succeeded each other down to the present time, having considered it their interest to restore, not the sentiments of a rational and evangelical religion, but the mechanical and superstitious practices of the *ancien régime*, the result has been, among many persons, a factitious opinion, which has brought confession into vogue, without, however, their believing in it or practising it. This is evident from the small number of persons who confess; for we know how far we ought to give credit to those formal confessions which take place just at the point of death.

For our part, far from allowing ourselves to be hurried away by fashionable opinions, or the preju-

dices of the middle ages, by feigning an approbation of a practice invented by sacerdotal policy; we believe that it is the duty of the friends of truth to contend against it as contrary to true religion, intellectual liberty, and the progress of civilization. We shall prove that confession, copied from the Pagans and Jews, had, among the earlier Christians, a character different from that which it later assumed. The former was instituted for the purpose of morality; whereas the latter aimed only at domination and the accumulation of power and riches. It will be seen how sacerdotal confession gave birth at one time to fanaticism, by infusing terror into minds, and at another, to a looseness of morals, and even to the encouragement of crime, by the assurance of pardon. In its train came those categories and distinctions by means of which the Casuists perverted morality, and confounded the ideas of good and evil, by presenting innocent or indifferent actions as crimes, and baneful ones as virtues. Thence also arose superstitious, vain, and puerile practices, which usurped the place of morality and an enlightened religion. We shall demonstrate how

fatal this institution has been to both ; and that the evils it has produced have not ceased to exist, in spite of the laws enacted and the measures employed to arrest their progress. We shall prove that this institution is only a human invention, since it was unknown to the apostles and earlier Christians, and that it was not lawful in those who succeeded them to impose new dogmas and precepts, as Tertullian observes, when he says : “ One must have lost one’s reason to imagine the apostles to have been ignorant of any truths useful to salvation, and people to have found in after ages anything, concerning morals and the conduct of life, more wise or more sublime than what Jesus Christ has taught them.” \*

Lastly, it will be seen that, though considered by some persons as a bridle for restraining vice, it makes those who submit to it neither better nor more virtuous than they who abstain from it ; that corruption and debauchery are as frequent in the countries where it prevails as in those where it is unknown ; that it is so much the more dangerous because its ministers are condemned to cel-

\* Tertul., de Prescrip., c. xxii.

bacy ; and that it was, and still is, a means to obtain riches and power, as is proved, even in our own time, by the foundation of so great a number of convents, little seminaries, and *congregations*.

To know what are the pretended results of confession, it is proper to examine whether any improvement has been effected since it has come into more general use, especially among those who are its defenders. Have the despotism of princes, the servility and avidity of courtiers and public functionaries, the corruption, and even the venality of legislators, the rapacity of monied men and monopolists, dishonesty in commerce, and the avarice of the clergy, disappeared, or even diminished in any sensible degree ? Far otherwise : we perceive a recrudescence everywhere, especially since material interests have been almost officially substituted for morality, and corruption has become a principle of state. It is, then, to cheat the people, that they speak in one manner and act in another. Do we ever see priests openly attacking the misdeeds of those who go in crowds to applaud their eloquence and pastoral zeal, and fling themselves at their feet in a confessional ? No : they must

treat gently the great ones of the world, wink at the laxity of their morals, and maintain the old adage—“*non caste, sed caute;*” and they must absolve them every day, notwithstanding their persevering in their sins. Such are the results of this confession, so useful and so necessary for salvation !

There are, doubtless, people fastidious enough to blame us for relating scandalous facts, the publicity of which, they will say, is injurious to the priesthood, and, consequently, to religion. Our answer to this charge is, that scandal is produced far less by the knowledge of crimes than by their impunity. It is only in this latter case that religion, being allied with perverse ministers, is degraded; for it then becomes responsible for their conduct. It is, on the contrary, honoured, and its dignity remains uncontaminated even by the fact that it has been avenged. They, therefore, make themselves accomplices and produce scandal, who cover criminals with their protection. Moreover, it is silence and impunity which allow corrupt priests to give free scope to their passions. It is, therefore, only by unveiling their misdeeds that we can cause them to be discontinued. Ly-

curgus used to cause drunken men to appear before young people, in order to teach them to detest an ignoble vice. It is not less useful to display to public opinion the deplorable conduct of a few wicked priests, and to prove that the kind of debauchery inherent in auricular confession will only cease by the abolition of a practice which has produced great evils, without doing any good.

It will doubtless be objected, that the number of facts quoted in this work bear but a small proportion to that of the confessions which take place every day in all Catholic countries ; and, also, that nobody has the power of abolishing an institution on which depends, according to the Church of Rome, the salvation of mankind. We answer to those who sincerely embrace the latter opinion, that they are at liberty to follow it in practice, even amid the dangers to which their wives and daughters are exposed. It is their own business. But, for our part, as we consider, with almost all mankind on our side, this doctrine to be as contrary to reason and pure religion as it is to divine justice and goodness, we reject and oppose it as fatal to the independence and progress of the human mind.

As to the facts mentioned in this volume, they are numerous enough and sufficiently serious, as well in a religious and moral as in a political point of view, *to demonstrate* to every person devoid of prejudices, the dangers and inconveniences of an institution invented for the interest of a sacerdotal corporation. To form an idea of the crimes that may be committed in the secrecy of confession, we must consider that these crimes never come to the knowledge of the public except in extremely rare circumstances ; for this reason, that the perpetrators and witnesses are only two persons, equally interested in their remaining unknown, since the discovery would bring them into disrepute; compromise their social state; nay, expose them to severe punishments; whence it must follow, that for one fact of this nature which transpires, there remain several thousands which will ever remain unknown.

We are astounded when we consider the numerous crimes of seduction, established by a few *procès verbaux* abstracted from the Inquisition. But how much greater would be our astonishment if, supposing there had been an Inquisition established in every province throughout Christendom

from the beginning of sacerdotal confession, it had been possible to search all such registers and present the result to the public!

There is another kind of scandal which has latterly excited the indignation of the public—that occasioned by priests, monks, and even bishops, who have exposed in works on morality and theology, designed for the instruction of seminarists, all the lewdness that the most licentious and audacious Casuists have imagined, to guide young seminarists in the practice of confession. It is impossible to feel too indignant when we see that these works are intended for the instruction of some fifty thousand priests or monks, who may daily propagate, in every part of France, ideas and practices of unparalleled depravity. Such great evils require strong remedies. It is not sufficient to accuse vaguely, by mitigated and deprecatory charges, to make the public feel all the seriousness of the evil. We must state, in textual terms, as far as decency, outraged by these authors, allows, the maxims professed in their works—whatever be our repugnance.

Finally, we find, in the writings of ancient and

modern theologians, the most respectable for their doctrine, piety, and learning, an answer to the charges that might be brought against us. “We ought, as far as possible, without sin, to avoid giving offence to our neighbour. But if the manifestation of truth produce scandal, it is lawful; it is more useful to produce scandal than to abandon the defence of truth.”\* Fleury, who must be, to all the sincere friends of evangelical precepts, a weighty authority, expresses himself upon the same subject as follows:—“I know very well it is a sad thing to bring to light unedifying facts; and I fear that they who possess more piety than learning may take it as an offence. They will say, perhaps, that in history these facts ought to be dissembled, or that after being just stated they ought not to be noticed in a discourse. But the foundation of history is truth.

“It is a species of falsehood thus to tell the truth by halves. Nobody is obliged to write his-

\* In quantum sine peccato possumus vitare proximorum scandalum, debemus; si autem de veritate scandalum sumitur, utilius permittitur nasci scandalum quam veritas relinquitur.—(S. Gregori, Hom. 5, in Ezech.)

tory; but whosoever undertakes it is bound to tell the entire truth.

“ He would be more reprehensible himsclf if he dissembled the bad actions which may render others bad, and deter them from committing the like, at least from shame, according to the words in the Gospel. Nothing is so hidden but will one day be discovered. . . . Sincerity is the basis of true religion: it needs no human policy, no artifice. As God permits evils which he might prevent, because He knows how to derive good from them for the elect, we ought to believe that He will turn to our advantage the knowledge of the irregularities He has suffered in His Church. If these irregularities had so far discontinued that there remained no vestige of them, perhaps we might allow them to sleep in eternal oblivion. But we see but too plainly the fatal consequences. . . .

“ The corruption of morals by new maxims produces too palpable effects; is it not useful then to know the source of such great evils?” \*

\* Fleury. *Discours sur l’ Histoire Ecclésia stique*, No. 13.



**B O O K I.**



## ON CONFESSION IN ITS RELATION TO RELIGION.

---

### CHAPTER I.

---

#### ON SIN AND PENITENCE AMONG PAGANS, JEWS, AND MAHOMETANS.

---

IN the order of God, every fault ought to receive a punishment; every good act its reward. The justice of God is impassive and immutable: it has not, like human justice, any need, any interest to pardon or punish. Its laws are inevitable, and cannot be altered by any human mediator, neither by prayers nor solicitations. Those to which man has to submit are simple, clear, evident to all, and easy to be observed by any one uncorrupted by education, false religion,

or the vices of social institutions. The punishments inflicted by God are not those of a revengeful tyrant, but of a father who loves his children. They are temporary like the faults, and proportioned to human nature, to its weakness and ignorance.

Such must be divine justice, if it be given to us to understand it; far different from that of those legislators, *those civil and religious tyrants*, who, aiming at domination, have perverted the attributes of God, and treated human nature with contempt. Man ought to forgive offences and injuries personally received; but his pardon, like the priest's, is powerless in arresting divine justice, which requires from the sinner only a sincere repentance and a firm resolution never more to violate its laws. It is then only that divine goodness and justice, in harmony together, will forgive.

The ideas of the Pagans as to the nature of what is designated under the name of *sin*, differ very much from those adopted by revealed religions. Among the former, religion was satisfied, on the one hand, to sanction the moral duties found in the natural law, and, on the other, to prescribe the respect, homage, and worship, due to the Deity, whether the latter was considered as one or complex; but it was different in revealed religions. Priests, too often rejecting reason and every law that was not the one to which they wished to

subject mankind, made themselves the arbiters of good and evil, and prescribed, in the name of God, the duties that man had to fulfil towards that God, himself, and his fellow creatures. These religions, based, in their origin, with a few exceptions, upon the laws of nature, were burthened with opinions, precepts, and new practices, which brought in their train new principles of morality, and, consequently, new obligations and duties. From this chaos, there necessarily arose new infractions, and an infinite number of offences or sins unknown to men before the organization of these systems.

Thus it is, that the penitential codes of these religions are found to be crammed with sins, from those the most revolting to human nature down to faults imagined by stupidity, the grossest superstition, bigotry, and the most absurd monkish servitude.

Let us follow, for instance, the Catholic religion in its mutations, since it is better known to us than Brahmism, Bouddhism, and Mahometanism. Let us look through the numerous precepts recorded in the works of certain fathers of the Church, in several councils, bulls, and papal rescripts, and we shall find a number of precepts and duties, the greater part of which are obligatory on pain of mortal sin and excommunication,—that is to say, according to Catholic theologians,—eternal damnation.

tion. It follows, therefore, from this doctrine, that all Catholics will suffer eternally the pains of hell, since there is not one who does not fail in the observance of a greater or less number of these obligatory precepts. Thus it is, that morality has been perverted by the ignorance and fanaticism of a few enthusiasts, and the progress of civilization and true philosophy has been arrested.

This philosophy, based upon the immortal truth of the divine law with which men were inspired long before there existed any revealed religions, makes sin consist in the non-observance of the duties commanded by reason. "Sin," says an ancient philosopher, "consists in what is contrary to reason, or in the omission of a duty."\* The thought of doing evil is even a sin, according to Marcus Aurelius, who expresses himself thus:—"Not only never to do evil, but not even to entertain the thought of it."† Meno imposes upon his disciples a purity not less perfect in thought than in word. "Having well meditated," says he, "upon the certainty of a reward reserved for acts after death, let him contrive that his thoughts, words, and acts be always virtuous."‡ According to Cicero, we ought to shun vice, even though we

\* *Peccatum antem, quod præter rectam rationem sit, vel in quo officii aliquid sit omissum.*—(Stob. Eclog. Eth., ii., p. 177.)

† *M. Aurel. Cogit.*, lib. i., c. 16.

‡ *Meno's Laws*, ii., art. 231.

had for witnesses neither gods nor men. "We ought to be convinced," says this philosopher, "that it is our duty to do nothing contrary to justice, order, or temperance, even though we could conceal it from the knowledge of gods and men."\* Democritus suggested to our actions a noble motive, when he said we ought to abstain from sin, not through fear, but from duty."† The philosophers were then unacquainted with what the theologians have since imagined under the name of mortal sins. They wished people to avoid even the slightest sins. "What seem to many persons," says Cicero, "slight faults, ought even on that account to be avoided the more carefully."‡ These same philosophers considered sin as the greatest of evils. "Real evils," says Pythagoras, "are the sins which are committed voluntarily and intentionally, and in whose company virtue can never be found: such are injustice and intemperance."§

\* Nobis persuasum esse debet, si omnes deos hominesque celare possimus, nihil tamen avare, nihil injuste, nihil libidinose, nihil incontinenter esse faciendum.—(Cicer., lib. iii., de Offic.)

† Non metu, sed officii causa peccatis abstinendum.—(Democr., Sent.)

‡ Quæ parva videntur esse delicta, neque a multis intelligi possunt, ab iis etiam diligentius esse declinandum.—(Cicer., de Offic.)

§ Hierocles, Commentary on the Verses of Pythag., v. 14.

If God punishes, if he requires compensation, it can be but for the faults or crimes which constitute a real infraction of his laws.. But it seems that man, impatient of upholding laws so favourable to his true interests, had been resolved to impose upon himself an insupportable yoke. Blind ignorance and superstition, and an excessive and sombre fanaticism, have imagined new duties and crimes, and thereby inspired fear and terror, by troubling the conscience and rendering man unhappy.

Thus it is that they imputed crime to the child on the very day of its birth, and condemned it to chastisement. Moses devolves the culpability of the father upon the heads of his children, even to the fourth generation; whereas Isaiah rejects the dogma. “The soul that has sinned shall perish; the son shall not bear his father’s punishment.” It is from the same prejudice that the Catholics think the Jews are punished and proscribed, on account of their forefathers not having acknowledged Jesus Christ. We damn also, without pity, the inhabitants of unknown lands, who never heard of our religion of meekness and charity.

Sin, ever based upon natural law in different religions, has, however, undergone some modifications, a greater or less degree of culpability, according to the spirit, prejudices, or interest of the founders, or of the priesthood. This is perceptible in the laws of Zoroaster, Meno, Bouddha, &c.

The former, considered by his disciples as one sent from God, has bequeathed to them, in the "Zend-Avesta," the following series of capital faults:— "1, to see evil and not to warn him who does it; 2, to teach evil or falsehood; 3, to harm anybody; 4, to cheat in anything; 5, to give no alms to the poor; 6, to intend to strike anybody; 7, to strike and wound; 8, to do evil; 9, to say there is more than one God; 10, not to acknowledge Zoroaster for the true prophet; 11, to disobey one's father or master; 12, to sow dissension among men; 13, to contradict the law; 14, not to take care of the sick; 15, to deter from penitence; 16, to do evil with demons (they who commit this sin are to be killed); 17, to deride anybody; 18, to carry off a wife; 19, to commit prostitution; 20, 21, 22, 23, loathsome crimes; 24, to live with a woman of a foreign religion; 25, to lie, deceive, deride, and to help anyone to do ill; 26, not to say one's usual prayers; 27, to commit crime again after doing penance for it."\* Lastly, we must not forget Zoroaster's remarkable law, relative to those who leave a productive land uncultivated, or who do not cultivate fallow ground.† Merit ought, indeed, to be attached only to acts useful to men, and not to corporal macerations, incessant prayers, and other sterile practices.

\* Anquetil Duperron, Zend-Avesta, t. iii., p. 30.

† Ibid, t. iii., p. 44.

We find, among the Brachmans, opinions relative to the nature of sin, generally conformable to reason, but which, however, differ from it essentially on several points. Here are the cases which, according to their casuists, are considered the most serious. Mr. Word, an English traveller, who has given us some very curious information concerning the religion of the Gentoos, enumerates, in the second volume of his work, page 148, a list of crimes which, in spite of their gravity, may nevertheless be redeemed by practices recorded in the sacred books of those nations: such are theft, pride, gluttony, fornication, false testimony, usury, &c. They consider as criminals those who forsake their father, mother, children, or friends; who neglect to pay their debts; who deny a future state; who put an enemy to death after he has surrendered in war; who eat nice food without giving any to others; who refuse food to their father or mother; who neglect the duties of religion; who despise the devout; who cause any grief to others, &c.

The sketch we have just given of the opinions adopted in the religious systems which differ from Christianity, are sufficient to give an idea of the similarity and dissimilarity which exist between those systems as to the nature and culpability of sin. This is what we shall perceive still better after reading the chapter in the second book of

this work, which treats of the penitential system imagined by our theologians and casuists. It is worthy of remark that Zoroaster, Mahomet, Brahma, and Bouddha, place far above all sins the crime of denying their mission. This opinion is, however, more exaggerated in the religious system of the theologians of Christianity, both ancient and modern. It is sufficient to cite two examples. Thus, Saint Clement considers the violation of the law of nature in one of its most important points, adultery, as far less criminal than the error of him who does not believe. "Adultery is a serious sin," says he; "it is, however, only placed in the second rank in the penal system; for the heaviest penalty is due to the error of those who do not believe, though their lives be conformable to the rules of temperance."\* The apostolic constitutions manifest the same opinion, when they say: "that there is no crime more enormous than idolatry."† We find in a work printed at Constantinople in 1841, with the title of *Commentary on Great Sins*, the series of sins considered as mortal by the doctors of Islamism; they were, towards the end of the first

\* Multum quippe grave peccatum est adulterium; in tantum ut secundum in pœnis obtinet locum; quando quidem primus debetur iis qui in errore degunt, quamvis temperanter vivant.—(S. Clem., Epist. ad Jacob, § 3.)

† Gravius delictum idolatriæ non reperitur.—(Const. Apost., ii., c. 23.)

century of the Hegira, a point of dispute between the Sounnies and the Khawaridj, that is to say, between the orthodox and the heterodox ; the former maintaining that the great sins do not imply infidelity (*keufr*), whereas the latter pretended that every criminal was also an infidel (*kiafir*). The Montafils, that is, the Dissenters, took a middle course by establishing the doctrine that criminals were in a middle state between the faithful and the infidel.

It is therefore very important to know the mortal sins of the Mahometans. Ismaïl Hakki reckons seventy, namely :—1st, association with God—that is, the doctrine which admits of more than one God ; 2nd, murder ; 3rd, ingratitude towards parents ; 4th, flight from an enemy ; 5th, innovation ; 6th, profanation of the sanctuary of Mecca ; 7th, the use of wine ; 8th, fornication ; 9th, loathsome sin ; 10th, calumniaition of honest women ; 11th, spoiling the inheritance of orphans ; 12th, false testimony ; 13th, bribery (of judges by presents) ; 14th, to eat in the day time in the month of Ramadhan ; 15th, abortion ; 16th, perjury ; 17th, to grow rich by oppression ; 18th, theft ; 19th, treachery ; 20th, to say prayers before the time prescribed, or to postpone them ; 21st, to beat a Mussulman without cause ; 22nd, to slander the companions of the prophet ; 23rd, to prefer Ali to the three Khalifs his predecessors ; 24th, to accuse the prophet of false-

hood; 25th, to refrain from giving proper testimony; 26th, to allow oneself to be bribed (passive corruption, in opposition to what is said above); 27th, suicide, or the mutilation of limbs; 28th, the profession of procurer; 29th, to slander the innocent to their oppressor; 30th, witchcraft; 31st, to prevent alms; 32nd, delay in actions commanded, or in abstaining from actions forbidden; 33rd, to speak ill of men of silence or the readers of the Koran; 34th, to forget the Koran; 35th, to burn animals (death by fire being reserved for God alone); 36th, the flight of a woman from her husband; 37th, to despair of the mercy of God; 38th, not to fear the punishment of God; 39th, to persevere in venial sins (which is equivalent to mortal sins); 40th, singing; 41st, dancing; 42nd, oppression; 43rd, love of the world; 44th, slander; 45th, seeking too inquisitively into others' faults; 46th, pride; 47th, self-love (having too good an opinion of oneself); 48th, envy; 49th, the omission of pilgrimages; 50th, adorning any creature; 51st, neglecting the duties of Friday; 52nd, to insult a Mussulman by calling him a kiafir; 53rd, servility to tyrannical emirs; 54th, onanism; 55th, to decry the face of one's neighbour; 56th, injustice in sharing; 57th, ingratitude towards God for what he allots to man; 58th, to meddle with an impure woman; 59th, to rejoice at the dearness of provisions; 60th, to be alone with one's neighbour's

wife; 61st, unutterable sin; 62nd, to believe in diviners; 63rd, to play at chess or draughts; 64th, lamentation over the dead when eulogising their good qualities; 65th, to listen to music; 66th, to look at a handsome face with desire; 67th, to receive gifts from tyrants; 68th, evil suspicions; 69th, derision and raillery; 70th, to give nicknames to one's neighbour.\*

Penance for the expiation of sins presents as great a variety in the different regions as their culpability. Here are the opinions followed in the religion of Brahma. This sectarian prescribes to his disciples, in these terms, the mode of penance they ought to observe: "When he goes into the desert to adore God and do penance, let him renounce his clothing, food, and other enjoyments to be found in cultivated places; let him eat, but very moderately, seeds, fruits, roots, and the leaves of trees growing in the desert; let him sleep on the ground where he has strown some grass or leaves; and rest himself on stones, sand, or ashes; let the skin of the wild ox or that of other animals, or else the bark of trees, serve him for clothing. His body must be exposed to the inclemency of the weather—to heat, cold, and rain, till it make his skin crack. It is by this kind of life, prescribed by the order of the beneficent God, that he will wipe

\* Journal Asiatique, Mars, 1843, p. 261.

out his sins and offences, even as fire consumes straw.”\*

We see that the austerity of this penance imposes all the kinds of privation and sufferings which are ever so much admired in our cenobites; and it is everywhere in the name of a good and merciful God that weak and credulous minds are excited to torment both soul and body. This penance is carried to a still higher degree of insanity, even as we find it practised in the third of the Vedas, where we find related the sufferings to which the radjahs subject themselves. “In order to mortify himself, he kept his eyesfixed upon the sun, with both his hands raised on high, and remained standing in this position.”† Travellers inform us that this practice

\* Cum in deserto et iverit, cultum et pœnitentiam faciat ; et vestes et cibum, et alias resquæ in culto loco productæ sint derelinquat, et granum et fructum et radicem herbæ et folium arboris quod in deserto productum sit, comedat, sed parum ; et super terram somnum faciat, in illa quidquam extendat, qualia folia et herbam et super lapidem et arenam et cinerem recubitum faciat ; et indumentum e bove silvestri et pelle animalium et pelle arboris conficiat . . . et oportet quod a calore et frigore et pluvia in corpore ejus vulnera cadant et pellis findatur. Et cum hoc vitæ modo quod Deus benignus statutum dedit, peccata et offendiones suas hoc modo comburit, quod ignis festucas.—(Malabarata apud Anquet. Duperron, t. ii., p. 586.)

† Et illa mortificatio hœc facit, quod oculum suum soli affixum tenebat, et ambas suas manus sursum cum sustulisset stans manebat.—(Anquet. Duperron. Philos. et Théol. Indienne, t. i., p. 296.)

prevails even at the present day ; they tell us also that fanaticism is carried to such a pitch of exaltation among those people, that they hang themselves to a mast with a rope, to which a hook is attached, which is inserted into the skin of the back. Some, who believe they shall thus obtain the remission of their sins and celestial bliss, are seen to allow themselves to be crushed to death under the colossal chariot of their deity. Lastly, these miserable creatures, who plunge into the wilderness of the deserts, are often devoured by wild beasts. Such are the excesses of insanity into which the human mind is hurried when led astray by religious fanaticism.

Penance, though far less severe in the religion of Zoroaster, is the condition of salvation to the sinner. "Whoever will distinguish himself among men by his piety, ought not to have any sins to reproach himself with. Let him constantly avoid every impurity, both in his actions and words; above all, let his tongue never utter any falsehood; let him be of a conciliating and sociable mind, and let his mouth, in harmony with his heart, never open but to do homage to justice; let him not be addicted to fornication, insults, and crimes of this nature; let him be an example of probity and wisdom in the eyes of the people of God. Our religion orders us to do penance sincerely. . . . . Penance is equally necessary to those who follow

our holy religion. It is, I say, commanded, without distinction, both to men and women, to do penance as long as they are in this world. For this reason, the infant, from his most tender age, is not even dispensed, to cleanse himself from the impurity he had acquired from the bosom of his mother. . . . Whosoever has died without doing penance, has taken along with him a multitude of things to torture and torment him, which he was accumulating all the time he remained in the world. . . . Woes, griefs, horrors—in a word, every torment shall be the only inheritance he has to expect in the world to come.\* The same book says, moreover: “To save himself from everlasting death, each ought to expiate his faults whilst he is on earth.”†

The Pythagoreans admitted a less severe penance than that of the Christians, and one conformable to the dictates of reason: it consisted in a sincere repentance and an entire resignation to the pains inflicted by Providence in this life. “For this reason,” says Pythagoras, “we must endeavour in all things not to sin, and, when we have sinned, we must run to meet the penalty, as the only remedy for our faults, by correcting our temerity and folly with the salutary help of prudence and reason; for, after we have fallen from our state of

\* Sad-Der, porte 40.

† Ibid, porte 63.

innocency by sin, we recover it by repentance and the good use we make of the penance with which God chastens us in order to restore us.”\* Seneca professes nearly the same doctrine. “He who repents of having sinned may be considered as innocent.”† The opinion of Epictetus, relatively to sin, is not less sensible. “There exists a Being whom we must please and obey. We must conform to the decrees of God. . . . Can we be exempt from every sin? No, doubtless; but we may avoid a great number by constant attention. We ought to be content, if, after having constantly applied our attention, we commit only a small number of sins or faults, which cannot be imputed to us as a crime.”‡

Pagan antiquity thought that these crimes might be effaced by prayers, sacrifices, and certain penitential formulas, practised in the mysteries, or introduced into the worship by the priests. “If prayers and sacrifices procure the remission of our sins,” says the philosopher Sallust, “by moving the gods and turning them in our favour, it is really because our good actions and our return to the Deity, by curing us of our wickedness, render

\* Hierocles, Comm. on the Verses of Pythagoras, v. 28.

† *Quem pœnitet peccasse, pene est innocens.* (Senec., *Thyestes.*)

‡ Arrian. *Epict.* *Dissert.*, lib. iv., c. 12.

us again participants in the goodness of the gods."\* It is a worthy spectacle to see a Pagan believe that repentance and the practice of good actions are the true means to find grace with God for the commission of sins. Pliny informs us the Romans thought that "the conscience of malefactors was liberated and their crimes effaced, by expiatory sacrifices, and that the manes of the dead were likewise thus appeased."†

The philosophers of antiquity, after having founded the duties of man on natural law, admitted only the infractions of this law to be sin. Being persuaded that there existed a God who does not leave crime unpunished, but who, however, is endowed with goodness and clemency, they thought that pardon belonged to him alone, and acknowledged, after God, no other judge but their own consciences. They gave themselves an account of their conduct by a daily examination of the conscience. This *surveillance* of oneself, far more efficacious than auricular confession in maintaining in the paths of virtue those who desire not to stray from them, was especially recommended by Pythagoras. This is the counsel he gave his

\* Sallust., de Diis et mundo, c. 14.

† Vulgata priscis temporibus opinio obtinuit, februa esse omnia quibus malefactorum conscientiae purgarentur, delebanturque peccata, aut manes animabus defunctorum placiti redderentur.

disciples: “Never close your eyes in sleep, on retiring to rest, before you have examined by your reason all the actions of the day. In what have I been remiss? What have I done? What have I omitted of what I ought to do? Beginning with the first of your actions, continue throughout. If, in this examination, you find you have committed any faults, reproach yourself severely; if you have done well, rejoice.”\* Seneca extols this practice in several places in his writings. He informs us that it was observed by Sextius, the philosopher, who recommends it in his *Sentences*, which have been transmitted to us.† “At the end of the day,” says Seneca, “when he had retired to his bed-room, he addressed an interrogatory to his soul. Of what faults, would he say, hast thou been cured to-day? What passion hast thou withstood? In what art thou better?”‡

Priests, after having established creeds, prac-

\* Hierocles. Golden Verses of Pythagoras, v. 41, and others.

† We have lately published this work, with the following title:—*Sentences de Sextius, philosophe Pythagoricien, traduites en Français pour la première fois; accompagnées de notes et de variantes; précédées de la doctrine de Pythagore, de celle de Sextius, et suivies de la Vie d’Hypathie, femme célibataire, et professeur à l’école d’Alexandrie;* par le Comte C. P. de Lasseterie. Paris, chez Pagnerre, 1813, 1 vol. in 12.

‡ Senec., de Ira, c. 36.

tices, and imaginary sins, supposed malevolent beings, destined by God to tempt men, to draw them into sin here below, and to torment them in a future life. This system was generally admitted into every religion, in order to inspire a terror which would not have been so strong, so efficacious in producing the effect they purposed, if they had confined themselves to establish a belief founded on divine justice,—that according to which God does not allow the crimes of the wicked to go unpunished. All these suppositions prevailed so much the more easily in the world, that they were proclaimed and supported by legislators and governments, who expected to find thereby an easy means of commanding arbitrarily and of being servilely obeyed. Thus, the cause which established an alliance between the throne and the altar dates from remote antiquity.

The Pagan philosophers rightly rejected eternal punishments, so contrary to justice and divine goodness; they ever reproached the Christians with having borrowed from Paganism such an exaggerated opinion, which could only find credit among the people. Celsus says, in addressing the Christians: “It was to overawe simple souls, whom they caused to dread the vengeance of the Gods,—an opinion, moreover, which had no foundation in reality. One may liken the frightful fictions of the Christians to the phantoms and other objects

of terror which were presented to the initiated in the mysteries.”\* The same Celsus said to them : “ You boast of believing in eternal punishments ; but do not all the ministers of the mysteries announce them to the initiated ?”†

Everlasting punishments appeared, however, too severe for trifling faults, even in the eyes of the rigorists ; it would have been considering God as a cruel implacable tyrant. But, as such faults were not to remain unpunished, a transitory place of suffering was imagined, which the Pagans designated under the name of Tartarus, and the Christians under that of Purgatory. This doctrine was admitted throughout the East, and Pythagoras imported it from that part of the world to Greece. This is what Hierocles tells us in the following passage : “ The wicked man does not wish the soul to be immortal, fearful of living after death only to suffer. But it is not so with the judges of hell ; they strive to correct the soul, and cure it by ordering punishments for the salvation of nature. The judges punish crime to expel crime.”‡ Plato derived this doctrine from the school of Pythagoras. His distinguished, as Eusebius remarks in his “ Evangelical Preparation,” three states or degrees in souls :— 1st, “ those that have lived well, which go to the

\* Apud Orig. cont. Cels., lib. iv.

† Ibid, lib. viii.

‡ Hierocles, Comm. in versa aurea.

celestial abodes; 2nd, those of inveterate sinners, which are condemned to eternal punishment; 3rd, such as have been neither holy nor addicted to evil, he condemns to flames wherein they will suffer for a longer or shorter period, according to the nature of their conduct. It was for them they said prayers.\* We meet with this doctrine in the writings of Sallust the philosopher, who says: "On leaving the body, there are gods who procure an expiation for souls, and demons who cleanse them from their sins."† It was admitted by philosophers in the time of Julian. This emperor, speaking of God, says: "If we serve him religiously, will he fail to draw our souls from the darkness of Tartarus, he who knows all those that are detained there? Assuredly, those regions do not limit his power, since he promises to religious mortals to make them pass from Tartarus to Olympus."‡ Zaleucus thought Tartarus to be a place of penance, when he said: "All the dead remembering the perjury they have committed, do penance, and feel a poignant grief not to have conformed all their lives to the rules of equity."§ Although the

\* Plat. in Gorgia et in Phædo.

† Sallust., de Diis et mundo.

‡ Julian's Letter to a Pontiff.

§ Mortuos omnes injuriarum quas commiserunt memores, pœnitentia invadit, et vehemens cupiditas qua vellent exactam sibi vitam, omnem fuisse justam.—(Zaleuc. apud Stob.)

opinion of everlasting punishment prevailed among the people in Pagan nations, it was generally supposed, however, that they were admitted for sins, more or less grave, to temporary punishments, since the custom of praying for the dead was general. It was according to this belief that a poet has said :—

“Ossa quieta, precor, tuta requiescite in urna.”

The relations and friends of the deceased who profess Brahmanism in the Indies, consider they relieve them by praying and offering up sacrifices on their account. The Hindoos celebrate a feast at Benarès, during which, children must offer, for the manes of their father, water, a little food, and alms. The deceased is absolved, by this act, from all his faults, and goes to take his place in the abode of bliss.\*

The aim of those who founded religions was to impose them on men, and they took, consequently, the measures most likely to seduce and strengthen them in the belief of their dogmas and precepts. They judged, without needing a very profound knowledge of the human mind, that there did not exist a more powerful motive than the fear of eternal punishment. For this purpose they represented their God as a vindictive being, irritable, and ready to punish, by atrocious and everlasting

\* *Journal Asiat.*, March, 1834, p. 224.

pains, those who violated the law presented in his name.

This religious system is clearly enounced in the following passage of the Ezour-Vedam :—“ What you have just told me of hell, and the punishments suffered there, fills me with terror and fear ; give me the means of avoiding them. It is only by penance, which must be done without delay ; for he who waits till death will do it for all eternity in hell. For penance to be fruitful, it must contain a full and sincere wish never to relapse into sin ; without which it is quite useless. To seek to obtain pardon of one’s sins through penitence, and, at the same time, to preserve the desire of falling into them, is to resemble an elephant led to the bank of a river to wash, and who, on leaving the water, runs to wallow again in the mire. What, indeed, is the use of making vain and sterile promises, and to have only an outward appearance of virtue in the eyes of God, who searches our heart, and knows all its most secret recesses ? None but God can forgive us our sins ; seek then to implore his mercy by your prayers, to obtain it by good works, and to deserve it by your love for him.”\*

The doctrine of eternal punishment has been introduced into Christianity by a natural consequence of human things ; and though it has been rejected

\* Ezour-Vedam, t. i., p. 306.

by a few theologians, it has, however, generally prevailed, and become dogmatical among almost all the sects. Origen, Augustin, John Chrysostom, and John of Dasmascus, have maintained, that the pains of the damned might be mitigated by God. But the Catholic church has rejected this doctrine, being less timorous than some of the ancient fathers, who had felt the difficulty of conceiving how a Being infinitely good could give existence to creatures that he foresaw must be eternally miserable. Origen believed that all the pains were purifying, and that they were to cease when they had produced their effect. Extravagant fanatical men imputed this to him as a crime; and that is doubtless what prevented this doctrine from prevailing. Moreover, Origen did not think proper that it should be divulged, for fear of giving obstinate sinners some hope that would have strengthened them in their crimes. Ever false considerations, religious or political, substituted for truth!

The Manicheans, who performed a grand part in the history of the early ages of Christianity, rejected eternal pains; however, Damascenus, who wrote to confute them, did not think that God inflicted on sinners, nor even on demons, pains of real suffering. Gregory the Great offers a very singular argument to justify an eternity of pains; he pretends that the damned are punished everlastinglly, because God had foreseen, by a kind of

middling science, that they would have always sinned, had they lived always on earth. But, of all the fathers, he who has painted in the most frightful colours sin and the terrible punishments which await it, if confession do not come to its assistance, is Saint Basil : “ When sin takes possession of you, I would have you think of that horrible and intolerable tribunal of Christ, where a judge presides, seated upon his exalted throne. Every creature will appear trembling before his glorious presence. We shall be there ourselves to give an account of our actions. They who have done much evil will be conducted by horrible shapeless angels, with faces of fire vomiting flames. Add also, in your own mind, the depths of hell, inextricable darkness, fire without light, having the property of burning, though devoid of flame ; moreover, a kind of worm venting poison and devouring flesh with inexpressible avidity, without ever being satisfied, and causing intolerable pain by his bite. Fear these things, and instructed by this dread, let it serve as a bridle to your soul against concupiscence, which carries you away to sin.”\*

After having determined the nature of the crime and that of the chastisements which are reserved for it in the life to come, they assigned a satisfac-

\* Saint Gregory on the Thirty-third Psalm.

tion or penance for it in the present life, more or less austere, according to the kind or character of the religions, or that of their founders or directors. Brahmanism imposed upon its penitents acts of revolting cruelty, which conducted them even to death, as we have just said. Paganism, on the contrary, remained satisfied with a few expiatory trials or ceremonies, which were by no means painful or disgusting. But let us see how they managed in Christianity.

---

## CHAPTER II.

PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS OPINIONS AMONG DIFFERENT NATIONS, ABOUT CONFES-  
SION AND REMISSION OF SINS.

---

THE philosophers of antiquity acknowledged that man, from the weakness of his nature and the effect of his passions, is liable to commit faults more or less serious and numerous. Crates used to say,—“It is impossible to find any one free from faults;”\* and Pliny the elder expresses the same opinion in these terms:—“Does there exist a single mortal who, at every moment of his life, puts in practice the precepts of wisdom?”† But, knowing these results, philosophers thought that we found in ourselves enough fortitude to diminish the number and gravity of the disorderly in-

\* Diog. de Laërce, Vie de Cratès.

† Quid, quod nemo mortalium omnibus horis sapit?—  
(Lib. vii., c. 40.)

clinations to which we are prone. It is owing to this consideration, that they have presented different motives which ought to incline us to shun vice and practise virtue. They established these motives on the existence of a just God, and, consequently, a rewarder of virtue, but, at the same time, an enemy of vice, which ought never to remain unpunished. They demonstrated that bad actions are as fatal to those who commit them as pernicious to the happiness of others ; whereas the acts of virtue and beneficence are equally useful to both. Lastly, they thought later that the avowal or confession of one's faults would be a powerful means to arrest the progress of vice, and lead men to the practice of virtue. But experience soon proved that this obligation could take effect only on persons guilty of crimes of public notoriety ; whereas it was illusory in cases of secret offences. Then it was, that priests, knowing how to take advantage of an opinion admitted into a religion of which they were the oracles, usurped the place of the people, in the presence of whom confession was made, and persuaded them, in the name of Heaven, that every individual, whatever were his crimes or faults, ought to present himself at their tribunal to make a secret declaration of them, and obtain a pardon which God granted only through their mediation. Such was the origin of auricular confession, which we find in

several ancient religions, in India, China, and elsewhere.

The ancients were well aware that repentance alone can justify man. "Salvation," said Democritus, "is found in the repentance of shameful actions."<sup>\*</sup> It was this primitive idea, perverted by priests, which led them to imagine a way of expiating crimes by mysterious practices and formulas. "They have invented," says Libanius, "expiations for homicide, in order to efface the crime of those who had been guilty of it."<sup>†</sup> Expiatory and penitential practices date from very remote antiquity, since they are to be found among the Brahmans, in one of their sacred books, the Bhagavata, which teaches that "man, by the aid of penance, very speedily obtains the supreme splendour."<sup>‡</sup> This doctrine, diffused throughout the East, among the Jews and Greeks, was adopted by the Christians, who made it an indispensable condition of salvation. "It is at this price," says Tertullian, "that the Lord has granted pardon; he has promised impunity only after it has been obtained by penitence."<sup>§</sup>

\* Rerum turpium pœnitentia salus est.—(Democr. sent.)

† Atque homicidis inventa sunt piacula, quæ flagitium purgent.—(Liban., Leg. ad Jul.)

‡ Bhagav., ch. 12, v. 19, liv. iii.

§ Hoc pretio Dominum veniam addicere instituit; haec pœnitentiæ compensatione redimendam propusuit impunitatem.—(Tertull., de Pœnit.)

The philosophers who laid down rules of conduct for men, never prescribed to them public confession, nor private confession later admitted; they were satisfied to intimate to them that, being by nature subject to commit faults, they ought to strive to correct themselves. Thus Confucius says to his disciples: "As nobody can live without committing some kind of fault, one must strive continually to correct oneself."\* The same philosopher acknowledges that we can expect the pardon of our offences but from God alone, independently of men. "There is but one God, who surpasses everything in honour and majesty; but if we sin against heaven, we can find no one to deliver us."† Another Chinese philosopher, Tao-Sse, had very judiciously conceived that the sinner can be reconciled to God only by repentance, a change of life, and the practice of virtue. "If we commit a bad action," says he, "we must correct ourselves and repent; if we quit the road to evil and practise virtue, we shall not fail to obtain happiness."‡

Natural religion being in China the religion of

\* Cum quis sine culpa vivere non potest, sua vitia assidue corrigere, non illum tædet.—(Noel sin. lib., class., p. 84.)

† Unum est cœlum, quod omnes honore et majestate superat; si autem in cœlum peccaveris, nullus est quem roges, ut a te pœnam eximat.—(Id., ibid, p. 195.)

‡ The Book of Rewards and Punishments, translated from the Chinese, by Abel Rémusat.

the State, and admitting no priesthood, it was not possible to establish, in the name of Heaven, a practice so contrary to reason as auricular confession. Moreover, a hell, horrible from its torments and duration, affirmatively established by the founders of divers religions, has never been adopted and sanctioned by the ancient or modern governments of that empire. The legislators and philosophers believed that, to govern men and make them better, it was necessary to teach them to revere Heaven and be just; and that it was sufficient to stop the irregularities of vice to subject them to temporal, but certain and immediate, punishments. Singular enough: despotism, which, in other countries and under very different circumstances, employs means of terror to enslave the people, had recourse in China, in a less extensive and a purely political sphere, to a kind of confession which may be likened to that which has been instituted by the court of Rome for a political purpose. The Emperor of China thus wished to become acquainted with the most secret acts of his agents; and the pope, by means of the cases of conscience which he reserves for himself, is ever informed of important facts, according to which he is guided in the government of his spiritual kingdom. Here is the information we find, on this subject, in the ninth letter of Father Lecomte:—“ Each of the viceroys, governors, and

mandarins, ought, from time to time, sincerely and humbly to avow the secret and public faults of which he feels he has been guilty in the administration of his duty, and to send them to the court in writing."

What is very remarkable, is, that auricular and sacerdotal confession is found to be established among the Siamese, doubtless long before it had been practised by the Christians. "The talapoin hierarchy," says Turpin, "seems as if it had taken ours for a model. Their priests have preserved auricular confession, which was never practised among the early Christians.....On certain days they approach his ear to make an avowal of their faults or weaknesses. Accordingly, they are not surprised that Christians admit auricular confession; but they cannot conceive how women can confide the secret of their fall to men; they are convinced that it is exposing themselves to the danger of prevaricating from the truth through modesty."\* But the danger is far greater when a woman relates to a young priest, circumstantially, the irregularities of which she may be guilty.

It was a generally received opinion in antiquity that the avowal, or confession, made to priests was a necessary condition to obtain pardon, either in the eyes of men or of God. For this purpose forms and ceremonies had been instituted according

\* *Histoire civile et naturelle du royaume de Siam*, par Turpin, t. i., p. 186 et 188.

to the countries or religious systems, or according to the practices of the meetings known under the name of *mysteries*, to which people applied for the expiation of their crimes. Philostratus acquaints us, on the occasion of an involuntary homicide, with the conditions to which the Gymnosophsists, or priests of the religion of Brahma, subjected their penitents before absolving them.

"He has committed," says Philostratus, "an involuntary crime, and he ought, in such a case, according to the laws of Minos, to leave his country and take refuge among the Gymnosophsists. It is only after they have purified and absolved him that he can return to his own country. But he must also expiate his crime by visiting the tombs of the dead, and there suffer a slight sacrifice of blood. He wanders in that neighbourhood, as long as he is not admitted into the company of the Gymnosophsists, and they do not take compassion on him as a penitent. "But," says Apollonius, "what opinion do those sages entertain of that fugitive?" "I know not," replied Timasion, "for he has been beseeching them for seven months to grant him a pardon, and he has not yet obtained it."\*

Confession, whether public or private, introduced into Pagan or revealed religion, dates from

\* Philostratus, Life of Apollonius of Tyana, ch. 5, book vi.

very remote antiquity. We find, in Stobœus, "that in the Indies they introduced those who had committed sins into a place, where they made a confession in presence of a certain number of persons. They demanded them to intercede with God in their favour. Lastly, a fast was imposed upon them which lasted for a long time."\* An instance of this public confession is to be found in one of the Pouzams, cited by the *Journal de la Société Asiatique*. A merchant of Benarès, having acquired a large fortune by illegal proceedings, confessed his sins in a public assembly, and did penance. The remission of sins is not yet obtained, in the religion of Brahma, by a few insignificant practices. "Penance is a good work, when, in submitting to it, you subject your five senses; otherwise it is only hypocrisy."† The same religion prescribes to its followers, as we see in the Vedas, to choose for themselves spiritual guides to direct them in the path of salvation. They owe them the greatest respect, and a passive obedience to whatever they command. It is a submission analogous to that which, in Catholicism, is imposed upon ascetics and devotees by their director.

\* *Hi coacti coram aliis, si quid peccati commiserint confitentur; rogantque ut alii Deum pro se exorent; longumque temporis spatium jejuniis exigunt.*—(Stob., Eclog. i., cap. 4.)

† Bhagvat-Goëta, Disc. prélim., pog. xxiv.

The Ezour-Vedam gives very wholesome ideas concerning the remission of sins. "Sin is an offence committed against God; he alone, therefore, can forgive it. Should a man commit a crime of high treason, will he be able to wash out his crime by repenting of what he has just done? Certainly not; his crime will subsist till the king has forgiven or punished him. All that you have just proposed for the remission of sins is, therefore, quite useless; and extraordinary fasts and the penance you impose upon sinners, serve only to prove your own wickedness."\* A remarkable passage is this, in which a Pagan attributes the forgiveness of sins to Him who has alone the right and the power to pardon, and in which those absurd and perverted practices, to which they want to subject human nature, are condemned. We find, in the same writings, the condemnation of those Christians who, blindly trusting to the absolution of a priest, fancy that a criminal conduct, continually prolonged, will be justified before God. "To presume on God's mercies, and give ourselves up to crime in the hope that God will ever show himself indulgent enough to pardon us, and that, for that purpose, we have merely to pronounce his name and invoke him, is a crime which God seldom forgives."† As truth is

\* Ezour-Vedam, t. ii., p. 37.

† Ezour-Vedam, t. iii., p. 29.

too often perverted and obscured by superstition, error, or fanaticism, we find, in the religion of the Hindoos, as in many others, contradictory, absurd, ridiculous, and even detestable creeds, precepts, and practices, such as the following :—“ Whoever knows the Oupnekhat, will receive the remission of all his sins, and enjoy a permanent repose in the celestial abode.\* To read, or even to hear the Ramayana recited, is what will deliver from every sin.† The same favour may be obtained by bathing in the Ganges, or the sacred ponds. We find in the Bhagavata the words that a woman must pronounce who burns herself in honour of her deceased husband. “ I shall be happy with my Lord that this expiation be made for the sins of my husband, whether he has killed a Brahman, violated the bond of gratitude, or put his friend to death.”‡

The Abbé Dubois, who gave, a few years ago, a good description of the institutions of the Indians, relates different manners and practices, by means of which those people obtain the remission of their sins. The *Gourous*, who are the directors of their consciences, can remit all the sins of those who, after falling prostrate before them, receive their bene-

\* Quisquis hoc Oupnekhat scit, omnia peccata sua ut procul fecit, in sede magna stabilis efficietur.—(Anquet. Duperro, Theol. ind., ii., p. 298.)

† Journ. Asiat., 4<sup>me</sup> série, ii., p. 231.

‡ Asiatic Researches, t. iv., p. 206.

diction—which is equivalent to the absolution of our Roman Catholic priests. The Indians have a great number of prayers, the recitation of which, more or less frequently repeated, effaces their sins. Lustral water, prepared by certain ceremonies, likewise blots out impurity and sins. Here is the formula, furnished by the missionary whom we have just mentioned. “Deign to grant forgiveness of sins to all the creatures in the world, who will offer you sacrifice and drink you. You came out of the body of the cow, therefore I offer you my sacrifices and prayers, in order that they who drink you may obtain the remission of sins, and the purification of their body and soul. Deign to absolve us from all the sins we have committed, whether through inadvertency, or deliberately. Forgive and save us.”\*

It is very remarkable that we find, in the religion of the ancient Pagans, instituted by Zoroaster, precepts and practices relative to confession, perfectly identical with what has been observed at different periods in the Christian religion. Thus, we find the avowal, regret, and public forgiveness of sins; auricular confession made to priests; the penance they impose and the absolution they give to sinners; lastly, a sort of pope, to whom God has granted the keys of heaven. Thus, the commen-

\* The Abbé Dubois, *Mœurs et Institutions des Peuples de l'Inde*, t. i., p. 206.

tators and casuists of the law of Zoroaster say—“The man who repents of his sin, and does public *paket* (penance), who is full of sincere regret, who publicly acknowledges his transgression, saying, ‘I have committed such an action,’ and who, doing so in sincerity, and repenting from his utmost heart, says, ‘I will sin no more;’ to him shall goodness and purity be restored.”\*

The Sad-Der, or sacred book of the Parsis, says, relatively to whomsoever has eaten human flesh: “He must go and cast himself at the feet of a doctor (priest), to entreat him to recite, in his favour, the penitential prayer, and give him absolution for his sin.”† The priest whispers into his ear the following words: “O Lord, forgive him all his sins, all his misdeeds, all his negligences.”‡ . . . . “Religion commands that, every day, as soon as light begins to dawn, the priest shall make to God certain oblations for all the sins you have committed, and that you yourself shall also perform that duty.”§ Lastly, a sovereign pontiff, *summus pontifex*, has the power of shutting and opening the gates of paradise, and this power

\* Anquet. Duperron, Zend-Avesta.

† Sad-Der, porte 81.

‡ O Domine, ei condonato omnia ejus peccata, omnia ejus malefacta, omnes ejus neglectus.—(Heyde vet. Perfar. religio, p. 579.)

§ Sad-Der, porte 72.

he receives from God. "You know that Almighty God entrusted the keys of paradise to Erdibehit. The Lord, on appointing him to this sublime duty, spoke to him thus: "Permit not those souls, which have neglected the care of my fire, to approach my paradise."\* The opinion that God has granted to certain men the power of remitting sins, is so general in Persia, that the chief of a sect, the Sawamees Naraeu, which has lately sprung up, has given himself this attribute. "This chief," says the English author who informs us of this fact, "gives, like the Roman pontiff, absolution for sins already committed; but does not venture, like him, to grant indulgences for the future."†

We find, in this same Sad-Der, a creed and certain practices which, from the great analogy they bear to the opinions received among the Catholics, touching auricular confession, the remission of sins, penance, and absolution, would seem to have been borrowed from the latter, if they did not descend from a far more remote antiquity. We quote textually the passage in the Sad-Der:—

"Every devout person ought always to recite the penitential prayers: shouldst thou happen to commit any sin, recite this prayer in the bitter-

\* Ibid, porte 11.

† Asiat. Journal, vol. iv.

ness of thy soul. Fail not to go and cast thyself at the feet of some priest, whose wisdom and probity may relieve thee from thy despair. Recite the formula of penitence, that thou mayest have nothing to fear, and give thanks to God. Shouldst thou have attained such a degree of depravity, that thy actions, with all their apparent merit, were only sins, pronounce not the penitential formula, for fear of becoming more wicked. If, in any other case, thou shouldst forget to take this precaution, thy sin, like a young tree spreading more every day, will increase with age. When thou approachest one of our priests to ask him for absolution, the number of thy sins will diminish. But, if thou have recourse to the sovereign pontiff, the gloom of thy soul will be dispelled to make room for a luminous, all-pervading, splendour. When the high-priest gives his benediction to any one, religion assumes, in the heart of the reconciled sinner, a new power, and bad habits vanish away. Thou mayest be very sure that a sin thus remitted no longer subsists in the heart of the offender, and that it gives place to merit. If it be not convenient to thee to present thyself before a prelate, go at least and find some wise priest, who may relieve thee of thy affliction. If thou shouldst find no one belonging to the sacerdotal order, go to some venerable layman. Lastly, shouldst thou not meet with the person you need

among the latter, turn thyself in the posture of a suppliant, with thy heart full of compunction, towards the sun, and recite the penitential prayers."

The moment they perceive that a patient has but a few moments to live, the law prescribes to his children and relations to make him pronounced the following formula of penitence:—"Whosoever recites, with fervour and piety, this prayer with a wise *destour*, will infallibly receive the remission of his sins from the God of Justice; and, whatever be the number of his crimes, the Sovereign Judge will not hurl him into hell. When he arrives at the bridge of Tchinavart, he will have the consolation to learn that an infinite reward awaits him in the abode of the happy. There, angels, taking him by the hand, will lead him to paradise, where they will allot him a place for eternity. But if the vestiges of death, freezing the blood of the dying sinner in his veins, prevent his tongue from articulating a word, his relations and friends must recite the penitential prayer for him: for, pronounced with zeal and piety, it will be heard by the Almighty, who will give it consideration on the day of judgment."\*

Zoroaster had imposed confession on his disciples, as we perceive in several passages of the Zend-Avesta. We even find, in this sacred book of the

\* Sad-Der, porte 49.

Parsis, the formula of this confession thus expressed: "In presence of the righteous judge Ormusd, I confess my sins, wishing to devote my body and soul to God. If I have committed any transgressions for which I must deliver up my body and soul, I give them to go into the behescht (paradise, abode of saints). Whatever be the kind of sin of which I have been guilty, in thoughts, words, or deeds, forgive me, who repent and renounce them."\* This formula bears so great an analogy to that prescribed by Pope Innocent III., that it would seem to have served as a model for the latter. After having enumerated, like the Catholic Casuists, a long list of sins, the Zend-Avesta adds: "And every other kind of sins of which I must repent with attention and intelligence; both those sins which I must confess in presence of the chief of the *destours* of the law, and those which I have committed in thought, word, or deed. O God, take pity on my body and soul, in this world and in the other; I renounce them and repent. If all the sins which entitle one to hell, have been committed by me, forgive me."†

It is to be remarked that this confession was made in public, before a certain number of persons

\* Anquetil Duperron, Zend-Avesta, t. iii., p. 33.

† Ibid, p. 33.

having the chief priest for president, even as it was the custom among the primitive Christians. The religion of Zoroaster prescribed confession on the point of death, in order to save oneself from damnation, which, however, in the case of people not conforming with this practice, was only temporary, as may be seen by the following passage: “Then let him say before he dies: ‘I repent from my heart and sincerely of my evil thoughts, words, and actions.’ If this man thus avow the ill he has done, his repentance will be the expiation; but, if he confess not the ill he has done, he will have occasion to repent of it till the resurrection.”\* Confession at the point of death is practised even now among the Parsis or Guebres, the descendants of the primitive disciples of Zoroaster. “When the Gaures are sick,” says Tavernier, “they call for their priests, to whom they make a kind of confession, and the priests order them to do alms and other good works, to obtain forgiveness of sins.”†

Lamism, which bears more than one relation to Catholicism, adopts likewise a public confession, which also is somewhat analogous to auricular confession. We find in a work entitled *Alphabet Thibétain*, the following passage: “There is in Thibet a solemn day (like Easter among us), when

\* Sad-Der, t. iii., p. 283.

† Tavernier, Voy. en Perse, liv. v., ch. 8.

the Grand Lama appears in public ; before entering the temple, he purifies himself by confession, and then recommends to all present to do the same, in order to receive absolution for the sins of which they may feel themselves to be guilty.\* The sacred writings of the Bouddhists formally prescribe confession, as a religious dogma. In the twentieth volume of the " Asiatic Researches," (p. 79-80,) we find a notice of a vast compilation of the sacred books of the Thibetans, in a hundred volumes, among which two books treat of *confession, or general supplication*, as well as of the *omission of the celebration of the festival of confession*, and another on *emancipation* and on the *benediction procured by the practice of confession* ; lastly, they treat also of the *sins we ought to confess*. It is probable that the Talapoins, who practise confession, derive it from the Bouddhists. An Italian monk, who has published an account of Thibet, enters into some details on this subject, as follows : " The monks admit repentance for sins, accompanied by a kind of confession. The clergy and almost all the laity choose a lama, or spiritual father, and they accuse themselves before him, in a general manner, of their sins, and this director afterwards prays for whoever has accused himself, in order to obtain the remission of his sins. This avowal of

\* *Alphabet Thibétain*, t. i., p. 264 et 265.

transgressions is called *tholsira*, which means confession." We see that this confession differs from that of the Catholics, in the penitent not being obliged to declare his sins in detail and circumstantially, and that the priest does not believe he possesses the virtue to remit or remove them at pleasure, but, as was the custom among the earlier Christians, he remains satisfied with exercising with his prayers the duty of intercessor.

There existed, among the natives of Peru, according to the Spanish historians, a confession which differed from that of the Catholics only in the penitents not declaring the sins of thoughts. Garcillaso says, in his History of the Indies, that the priests heard confessions and gave absolution ; but their ministry did not extend beyond outward sins. It is very remarkable to find confession established, with only a slight modification in form, upon almost all parts of the globe, even in places which have had no relation nor communication with each other.

---

### CHAPTER III.

#### CONFESSiON IN USE IN DIFFERENT RELIGIONS : CONTINUATION OF THE PRECEDING CHAPTER.

---

THERE exist among nations that have attained a certain degree of civilization, religious, political, and moral opinions, which, transmitted from age to age, and from people to people, have so changed in nature, that it is difficult to trace back to their source and discover what they were in their origin. Thus, an image, a political invention, the production of a mind in frenzy, an allegorical fable, a supposition, a fact stated at random, or for the purpose of deceiving men, nay, often useful institutions and practices, have given birth to erroneous opinions, and to prejudices as fatal to the progress of knowledge and the discovery of truth, as to the welfare of mankind.

The origin of auricular confession may be con-

sidered under these relations: thus, the avowal of one's transgressions or misdeeds towards individuals or society was an act of justice and reparation, and a proof of repentance to which man returning from his errors and wanderings, thought he ought to submit, either to fulfil the duty dictated by his conscience, or to recover the esteem and consideration he had lost. Doubtless, few people are inclined to submit to this act of loyalty, which is galling to pride and vanity, so common among men. So it was only among the Christians, who professed a humility often carried to the very degradation of human nature, thus this practice became general at a period when the extravagant zeal of the newly converted excited them to provoke martyrdom. The Christians, convinced of the moral effect to be produced by public confession, adopted this practice which they had found established among the Pagans. Persons whose crimes were known to the public went and accused themselves before the Church, that is, in the assemblies of the faithful, whether laymen or priests. They testified their repentance, and asked for a pardon, which was granted them, after the fulfilment of the penance imposed by the interference of the elders, overseers, or bishops, with the formula of a few words and the laying on of hands. But the priests gradually attributed to themselves not only the exclusive right of pardoning, but also

that of hearing the avowal of sins. This avowal, which, at first, had been made in a general manner and without there having been any question of secret sins, then became a confession in which every transgression was to be declared with all the details and circumstances with which it had been accompanied; thus it was that auricular confession was introduced into Christianity. But let us examine what was, in paganism, private or public confession.

Pagan moralists recommended the avowal of transgressions as an act of frankness and loyalty, and even as a duty of the virtuous man. Indeed, he who frankly avows his misdeeds gives a proof of his sincerity, and the regret he feels at not having fulfilled his duty, either through the effect of human weakness, or from not having moderated his passions. It is a satisfaction due to fellow-mortals or society, who can esteem and receive us with benevolence only when we acknowledge the wrong we have done them; for, if you deny it, there is reason to believe that you are ready to do it again. Moreover, this act ever proceeds from a noble soul, impassioned for virtue, and hostile to two shameful vices—falsehood and hypocrisy. It was from the same principles that the early Christians required a public avowal of public offences from those who wished to be received into their association, or to remain in it, after having been

admitted. But this institution, calculated to restore to and maintain in the paths of virtue, was speedily perverted by the sacerdotal spirit, which arrogated to itself exclusively the right of knowing sins, whether public or private, by establishing auricular confession presented as a sacrament of divine institution.

The avowal of transgressions was, moreover, considered by philosophers as a proof of moral improvement. "The avowal of a man's sin," says Epicurus, "is a proof that he seeks to become better."\*

Pythagoras used to say to his disciples: "Do not try to disguise your conduct by your words; but correct yourselves when you are reprehended;† we do not fear to acknowledge our vices when we intend to correct ourselves." "Why does no one avow his vices?" asks Seneca. "Because he is still swayed by them. This avowal is a sign that a man has corrected himself. Let us take courage, then, in order to free ourselves from our errors; it is only by the aid of philosophy that we shall succeed."‡ Lastly, this

\* *Initium est salutis, notitia peccati.*—(Epic. apud Senec.)

† *Vitia tua non verbis celare conaris, sed emendare reprehensionibus.*—(In Stob., de Fiducia, serm. 13.)

‡ *Quare vitia sua nemo confitetur? Quia etium nunc in illis est. . . Vitia sua confiteri, sanitatis indicium est. Expergiscemur ergo, ut errores nostros coarguere possimus. Sola autem nos philosophia excitabit.*—(Seneca, Epist. 13.)

kind of confession is favourable to morality, without being at all debasing to him who submits to it: it does not allow those whose knowledge, experience, and advice are implored, to form a corporation to arrogate the right of prescribing alone, and in the name of Heaven, doctrines and acts many of which are reproved by Heaven.

Confession, such as it was proclaimed by Pagan antiquity, and such as it was understood by the primitive Christian, such as it is alone approved by every man devoid of prejudices, is found very well prescribed by Epictetus in the following formula: “Hear what are my opinions, and show me yours; let us mutually correct each other. If I have any depraved opinion, correct it; should there be one in you, do not conceal it, but bring it to light. This is what is proper for philosophers to do.”\* It was also what was proper among the early Christians, and what they practised. It was their *confitemini ergo alterutrum*, “confess yourselves to one another”; which does not indicate the ministry of a priest: it is an avowal, an acknowledgment made to one’s brethren as a proof of repentance, and with the intention of correcting

\* Accipe igitur mea quæ ego sentio : ostende tu etiam quid sentias. Emendemus nos mutuo. Si qua est in me opinio prava, detrahe eam mihi; si quam tu habes, noli celare, pone in medium. Illud nimirum est convenire philosophum.—(Arr. Epict. Dissert, lib. iii., cap. 9.)

oneself. The doctrine of Jesus Christ and that of Epictetus are, in this point, absolutely the same.

Jesus Christ said that his yoke was light; but we must confess that it has been made singularly heavy by the priests who succeeded the earlier apostles.

Thousands of laws and practices, sprung from their imagination, have engendered thousands of sins, and afforded ample matter for confession. Thus it is that they have impressed upon minds a direction favourable to their interests, and mastered them, by making themselves the arbiters of their future destiny.

After having invoked hell as a powerful auxiliary of conviction, the casuists established a series of sins, into which they introduced acts, words, and thoughts, contrary to the opinions they were seeking to make prevalent among nations. This is, indeed, what has taken place in all ages. We can, without speaking of Brahmanism, or Bouddhism, cite the Catholic religion in the state of degradation to which it has been reduced. Numerous volumes would scarcely suffice, if it were necessary to lay before the reader the laws, precepts, and practices which have been imposed upon the Christians; and, by a necessary consequence, the long series of sins which the casuists have deduced from those laws, which they have analysed, specified, and commented upon with so much sa-

gacity and penetration. The Mussulman religion, without enjoying the advantages of auricular confession, has, however, the good fortune to possess theologians and casuists, who, without having attained the same degree of skill and refinement as certain Catholics, have, however, successfully treated this matter, as we have already observed in the preceding chapter.

Instead of seeking to amend his faults or crimes by endeavouring to employ his whole life in actions useful to his fellow-creatures, the superstitious man tranquillizes his conscience by expiations, penances, and other practices, both insignificant and absurd, nay, contrary to reason and the divine law; for one could never satisfy in this way the justice of God or that of man. Instances of this kind of insanity have been and are but too frequent in all religions, even among civilized nations. We will quote but one, taken from the Greeks. When a man had committed a murder, he entered any individual's house, and sat with downcast eyes in silence on the hearth, or laid upon the ground the instrument of the murder; then he, whose protection was implored, rubbed the criminal's hands with the blood of a young pig, and sprinkled him with lustral water, invoking Jupiter, the expiator." \*

\* Apollon. Rhod., lib. iv.

The Romans, adopting the gods and rites of Greece, introduced their expiations even into their laws. Cicero quotes an ancient law of the republic: "Let every sacrilege which cannot be expiated be an act of impiety; and let what can be expiated be so by the public priest."\* The emperor Julian, in a letter to a Pagan priest who had committed some sin, expresses himself thus: "I will join my prayers to yours, in order that, by legal expiations, you may obtain from the gods a pardon for your offences." Ancient Rome, notwithstanding her superstition, was far from believing that auricular confession possessed the virtue of effacing sins—an invention reserved for New Rome. Moreover, this expiation of crimes, by means of lustrations, absolutions, and sacerdotal prayers, which were again old remnants of ancient superstitions, no longer found, even in the time of Augustus, any credit—with a few exceptions—but among the people; which Ovid has expressed very philosophically in the verses which we give in a note,† and which Cicero affirms

\* *Sacrum commissum, quod neque expiari potest, impie commissum esto. Quod expiari poterit, publici sacerdotes expianto.*—(Cicer., de Legib., lib. ii., cap. 9.)

† *Omne nefas, omnemque mali purgamina causam,  
Credebant nostri tollere posse senes.*

in his book on the laws: "It is in vain that men get themselves absolved from their crimes and impieties."\*

This supremacy which man-priest wished to assume over his fellows in the name of Heaven, is even to be found in Islamism. In the "Asiatic Researches"† there is some mention of a sect of Mahometans that existed at Burhampoor. Its chief is a high priest, or *moullah*, who raises a considerable revenue from his disciples; he has a supreme authority in all ecclesiastical matters, and even, in certain respects, in temporal affairs; he possesses also the key of paradise. It is considered as an article of faith that no one can be admitted into the abode of the blest without a passport from this high priest, who makes them pay for this favour.

Confession, even auricular and sacerdotal, was introduced among the Greeks, who had, doubtless,

Græcia principium moris fuit, illa nocentes,

Impia lustratos ponere facta putat.

\* \* \* \* \*

Onimium faciles, qui tristia crimina cœdis,

Fluminea tolli posse putatis aqua!

(Ovid, 2 Fast.)

\* Expiatio scelerum in homines atque impietatum nulla est.—(Cic., de Leg., lib. i.)

† Asiatic Researches, vol. vi., p. 44.

derived this custom from Egypt or the East. Empedocles and Pythagoras seem to have been the first who recommended it to their disciples as a means of expiating their sins. "Apollonius," says Philostratus, "having practised towards him the expiatory sacrifices prescribed by Empedocles and Pythagoras, he ordered him to withdraw, as being absolved from his crime."\* Plato speaks of a kind of superstition introduced into the use of auricular confession which took place in his time, and which has been introduced for the same reason into the modern confession of Catholics. "Persons who believe in the gods," says he, "and permit themselves to offend them by their words or actions, act thus, because they often think it is easy to appease them, and gain them over by sacrifices and prayers."†

The priests, who, doubtless, had found it their interest to make themselves the depositaries of the most intimate thoughts and of the actions of men distinguished by their riches and social position, and alone admitted into the mysteries, had introduced there auricular confession.

It is an established fact, that the confession of

\* Apollonius peractis super eo iis quæ Empedocles et Pythagoras de purgationibus sancere, abire jussit, tanquam jam absolutum a crimine.—(Philostr., de Vita Apoll., vi., c. 5.)

† Plato, On the Laws.

sins was a condition of being admitted into the mysteries which existed in pagan antiquity in different countries, under divers names, and under the invocation of some god. Several of these institutions had passed from the East, and several other parts into Greece. Homer, Herodotus, and other Greek authors, speak of expiations, which were likewise practised among the Lydians. Alcibiades, on being initiated among the Samothracians, was asked by the priest what was the greatest crime he had committed in his life. "*If I have committed one,*" replied he, "the gods know it."\* An answer which men would do well to give to those priests who pretend to impose on them the obligation of revealing to them the secrets of their own conscience and that of their families. It is stated, in the life of Marcus Aurelius, that he confessed his sins to the hierophant, when he was admitted into the Eleusinian mysteries.

A passage in Plutarch proves to us that confession was a kind of superstition, the use of which the priests had managed to introduce among the lower classes, for the purpose of holding them in subjection. "But how would you speak to the superstitious man? How would you give him any assistance? In his grief, he will be out of his house, wrapped in a sack, or girded about the

\* Plutarch. *Apophth. Lacedem.*

loins with some dirty tattered rags; often he will wallow quite naked in the mire; he will confess and declare I know not what sins and faults he has committed, how he has eaten this or that, or that he has been somewhere where God forbade him to go.”\*

We find confession to have been in use with the Egyptians and among the Greeks. Apollonius, sailing on the Nile, met a youth who offered to become one of his disciples: “Declare, young man,” said Apollonius to him, “whatever good or evil you have done, so that you may obtain forgiveness by my ministry, and give yourself up to philosophy with my disciples.”†

The religion of the Greeks, less indulgent than that of Christ, refused forgiveness for certain crimes, whereas, in the latter, however horrible and numerous they may be, they receive an absolution which secures for criminals the heavenly abode. “With what abominable murder will your hand be defiled?” cries a personage in Euripides’ tragedy of Medea. “They who have not shuddered to shed the blood of their relations have

\* Plutarch. *De Superst.*, § 20.

† O adolescens, quid boni malive abste sit gestum expone, ut horum quidem veniam a me consequaris, atque mecum et cum istis philosophiam secteris.—(Philostr., *de Vita Apollon.*, vi., c. 3.)

expiated their crimes by horrible punishments." \* This severity of Paganism is attested by several historical facts.

Lastly, all these opinions of confession, expiation, and penitence, which derive their origin from the ancient religions of Eastern Asia, are met with among the Jews. The prophets are incessantly preaching penitence to the children of Israel. "Be converted and do penance for all your iniquities," says the vulgate Latin version of Ezekiel.† The days of expiation and penitence, as well as the prayers which ought to accompany them, are even fixed by the law:—"The seventh month and the tenth day of that month, you shall trouble your souls . . . In that day there shall be an expiation to purify you from all your sins, and you shall be pure before the Lord—in order that you may pray once in the year for the sons of Israel and for all their sins."‡ The Jews, as well as the Pagans, ran together in crowds to

\* Medea, act vi., sc. 3.

† Convertimini et agite pænitentiam ab omnibus iniquitatibus vestris.—(Ezech., c. xviii., v. 30.) (The Hebrew means, "Repent, and turn away from all your sins.")

‡ Mense septimo, decima die mensis, affligetis animas vestras. . . In hoc die expiatio erit vestri, atque mundatio ab omnibus peccatis vestris; corum Domino mundamini. . . ut oretis pro filiis Israel et pro cunctis peccatis eorum semel in anno.—(Levit., c. xvi., v. 19, et seq.)

Paul, when he was at Ephesus, and declared publicly their sins without any auricular confession, which it would have been impossible for him to hear.\* The Jews continue, in our own time, the same prescriptions. "The Rabbins," says the *Abbé Chiardini*, "have the power of absolving and retaining sins, of excommunicating, and imposing fasts and other penances which may remit sins and preserve from calamities."† They term confession *viddui*, every letter of which word is the symbol, or signification, of a mortal sin. It is to these sins that the examination of the consciences of the common people is directed: more enlightened people enter into greater details. This confession, which is made to God alone, takes place every fast day. Certain days are likewise appropriated to penance among the Jews; persons who do not believe themselves to be sufficiently enlightened to know to what kind of penance they ought to submit, consult the Rabbins in order to be directed by them, even as the custom was among the Primitive Christians, who applied to the priests for the same purpose.

Auricular confession has been admitted at all times among the Jews, as is seen by the writings

\* Multi credentium veniebant confitentes, et annuntiantes actus suos.—(Luc., Act., c. xix., v. 18.)

† Chiardini, Théorie de Judaïsme.

of their doctors. "The Rabbins," says the "Talmud," "taught, that when anybody is ill and believed to be in danger of death, he must be warned that he ought to confess; for all those who are at the point of death confess their sins."\*

They also make their confession to God alone. For that purpose, they have a formula containing the capital sins. They recite it on fast-days, twice a week, or when they are exposed to any danger or serious malady.

The Christians, after having borrowed the greater part of their practices either from the ancient religions, or from the opinions admitted by philosophers, far from owning this fact, have laid down that it was, on the contrary, the Pagans who had derived them from the Old Testament, or that they had been suggested to them by the devil, who thus sought to deceive men by leading them to imitate the mysteries and truths of Christianity. This is what has been advanced by the fathers of the Church, and more especially by Tertullian, in what concerns confession, as we may judge from the following passage:—"The devil makes attempts to imitate, in the mysteries of the Pagans, the sacra-

\* Docuerunt Rabbanini cum quis ægrotat et in mortem propendere judicatur, dicitur illi confiteri; solent enim omnes morientes confiteri.—(Talmud in Tractat. de Sabbatho, c. ii., f. 32, p. 1.)

ments of the Christians. He baptises the faithful and those who believe in him ; he promises the remission of sins by ablutions, and he marks with a sign the brow of those whom he initiates into the mysteries of Mithras. He celebrates the Supper, and announces the Resurrection. He has his virgins, and persons who observe chastity.\*

It is easy to refute the plagiarism of which the Pagans have been accused—an assertion not only devoid of every proof, but founded upon palpable anachronisms and belied by every fact. In good logic, the question is, not to set forth facts only—they must also be proved. Now these proofs have never been produced by either ancient or modern theologians. It is evident that the ancient religions could not have imitated Christianity, which was preached a great number of ages after them, and especially auricular confession, introduced into the latter religion long after its existence. It is not less false that these opinions have been derived from the Old Testament, which was evidently never known to the philosophers, or men, who founded at

\* Tentat diabolus œmulare ipsas quoque res sacramentarias in idolorum mysteriis. Tingit et ipse quosdam, utique credentes et fideles suos. Expiationem de lavaero repermittit ; et si adhuc initiat Mithrœ, signat illie in frontibus milites suos. Celebrat et panis oblationem et imaginem resurrectionis inducit. Habet et virgines, habet et continentes.—(Tertull., Prescript., lib. i., c. 41.)

the furthermost part of Asia different religions some thousands of years before the existence of Christianity ; whereas these same opinions, which in time had penetrated among the different people of Western Asia, and thence into Greece, and even to Rome, have been known and adopted by the Jews, and even by the Christians. These facts prove evidently that the latter have been but the imitators of those who preceded them. As to the supposition that the manœuvres of the devil led the Pagans into error and away from Christianity, they may be adopted by those who have no better proof to uphold a system which they fancy themselves obliged to support, even against evidence.

---

## CHAPTER IV.

CONFESSTION MADE TO GOD ALONE IN PRESENCE OF THE FAITHFUL. REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS AMONG THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS. AURICULAR CONFESSTION UNKNOWN AMONG THEM.

---

WHETHER the custom of publicly avowing their sins was borrowed by the Christians from the Pagans or from the Jews, it is evident that this kind of confession was addressed only to God, and for the purpose of obtaining a forgiveness which he alone had the power of granting. On one hand, they implored his clemency, whilst, on the other, they entreated the faithful to intercede with him. But, before the corruption of their religion, the Chris-

tians never thought that absolution given by a man could involve the forgiveness of sins in a future life. Submission, or reconciliation with the Church, was admitted by the assembly of the faithful, and manifested by the imposition of hands, without the sinner being, on that account, absolved towards God. Thus it was, that after having recognised true repentance in him, and after he had become reconciled with God by penitence, he was admitted to the participation of the holy mysteries.

They used to accuse themselves generally, without mentioning the number or nature of their sins ; for this would have been to no purpose with respect to God, and useless as regards men when they were acquainted with the transgressions, or opprobrious, when they were ignorant of them. Thus it is sure—as we shall perceive from the proofs we are going to produce—that auricular confession was not practised till several centuries after the establishment of Christianity ; that it began to be introduced only towards the ninth century, and became obligatory only on the beginning of the thirteenth. We find no trace of it in the writings of the New Testament. Besides, if a practice, which they pretend to be of divine institution, and which they have raised to the rank of a sacrament, had been considered as such in the early ages of the Church, it would have been mentioned a hundred times in the works of that period, handed

down to us, as has been the case in the numerous writings which have since appeared.

The Catholic theologians have pretended that the word *exomology*, which we meet with in the writings of the ancient fathers of the Church, designated secret or auricular confession, such as it was introduced at a later period. But it is evident, by examination, and by the tenour of the passage where this word is used, that it means the manner in which they proceeded, who publicly accused themselves of transgressions for which they solicited forgiveness. The custom, at that period, was, that they who subjected themselves to penance should confess their sins in the presence of the faithful. They stood under the church-porches in an humble posture, covered with sackcloth and ashes. They groaned aloud, imploring forgiveness of their sins, and the indulgence and prayers of the persons present. They fell prostrate on the ground, beat their breasts, kissed the feet of the bishops, &c. The period of penitence being ended, they were introduced into the church by the bishop, or by the eldest of the priests. There, in the presence of the widows and all the people assembled, and of the clergy, they again manifested their regret for their transgressions, and again they recommended themselves to the prayers of the faithful. This is what is clearly expressed in the

writings of several fathers ; and the following is to be found on this subject in Tertullian :—

“ *Exomology* is an act of discipline in which man humbles and prostrates himself, and hopes, by changing his conduct, to obtain forgiveness. He must change his costume and manner of living, cover himself with sackcloth and ashes, keep his body unclean and his soul in affliction, and acknowledge his transgression with repentance. His drink and food ought to be simple, and he must use them, not to satisfy his body, but for the sake of his soul. He must frequently accompany his prayers with fasting, groans, tears, and sobs ; invoke the Lord day and night ; have recourse to priests ; fall prostrate before the beloved of God, and address his supplications to all his brethren. *Exomology* is composed of all the practices which constitute penance ; it inclines to honour God through the fear of danger ; it judges the sinner who has incurred the divine wrath ; it does not do away with the flames of hell, but it preserves from them all those who have deserved them.”\*

\* Exomologesis prosternendi et humiliificandi hominis disciplina est, conversationem injungens misericordiae illicem. De ipso quoque habitu atque victu mandat, sacco et cineri incubare, corpus sordidus obscurare, animum mœroribus dejicere illa quæ peccavit, tristi tractatione mutare. Cœterum pastum et potum pura nosse ; non ventris scilicet, sed animæ

The passage we have just quoted has no relation to auricular confession made in private to a priest, whereas we perceive in it that public confession which took place in presence of all the faithful, when any one asked pardon for his sins.

Saint Chrysostom, who speaks of penitence in several of his writings, would not have omitted to mention secret confession made to a priest, had it been in use in his time, and obligatory as well as sacramental. But, far otherwise;—the passages we are about to quote, and others that we might bring forward, say expressly that one must confess only to God—*sibi soli*. The first is thus worded:—“I do not tell you to make publicly and ceremoniously a confession of your sins, and to be your own accuser, but I ask you to conform to the words of the Prophet, who says, ‘Reveal your life to the Lord.’ Confess to the Lord your judge, declare your sins to Him, if not aloud, at least in recalling them to mind; pray to Him, and ask Him to take pity on you. It is better for you to suffer pangs

causa : plerumque vero jejuniis preces alere, ingemisere, lacrimari et mugire dies noctesque ad Dominum suum, presbyteris advolvi et caris Dei ad geniculare, omnibus fratribus legationes deprecationis suae injungere. Hæc omnia ex-mologesis, ut pœnitentiam commendat, ut de particulari timore Dominum honoret, ut in peccatore ipso pronunciant pro Deo indignatione fungatur, et temporali adstrictatione æterna supplicia, non dicam frustretur, sed expurget.—(Tertull., de Pœnit., c. ix.)

now by recalling your sins to your minds, than to suffer chastisement in the life to come; for your iniquities will be forgiven, when you acknowledge them in the presence of God, and implore His clemency. Should you not think of them, the remembrance of them will arise in spite of you, when they will be displayed before your friends and enemies, and in presence of the angels."\* And again: "I exhort and pray you, my very dear brethren, to confess more frequently to immortal God, and to gain his favour by asking him to forgive your sins. I do not require you to make a show of your sins, and to reveal them to men. Search your own conscience, and lay bare its recesses to God. Show your wounds to that skilful physician, and entreat Him to cure them, in order that you may be purified and delivered from your sins, without undergoing the dishonour which would result from their being made public."† Let us cite one more passage, which is not less conclusive than the preceding: "Why are you ashamed, and do you blush to confess your sins? Is it before a man who will despise you? Before an inferior who will divulge them? It is to your Master, who takes care of you and cures your evils.

\* S. Chrysost., Homil. 31, in Hebr., vel forsan in Homil. 30, de Baptizat.

† S. Chrysost., Homil. 30, de Incomprehens. Dei natura.

He knows them without your imparting them, and He foresaw them even before they existed. ‘No’ says He, ‘I will not produce you in public and make a show of you to a great number of persons. Discover to me alone your transgressions, so that I may remedy them and you may be cured.’”\*

Lastly, Saint Chryrostom lays down the same doctrine for the cases in which one was dispensed from public confession. “If we have reason,” says he, “to admire the pardon which God grants for our offences, we ought not to be less surprised that he should keep our sins in impenetrable secrecy, not demanding them to be brought to light, and in detail, before the public, but, on the contrary, ordering us to avow and give an account of them only to himself. For, indeed, he remits sins, and does not force us to expose them to men, with accompanying circumstances; he only demands that he to whom he grants remission should be aware of the importance of so great a benefit.”† We see, from this passage, that, even in the cases

\* Id., Homil. 4, de Lazaro.

† Neque hoc tantum est, admirabile, quod nobis peccata dimittit, verum et quod ipsa non revelat, nec manifesta facit, aut conspicua, nec cogit in medium procedentes quæ peccavimus, enunciare; sed soli sibi rationem reddere jubet, et sibi confiteri . . . verum et peccata dimittit, nec cogit præsentibus quibusdam ipsa enunciari; sed unum solum exigit ut ipse remissione fruens, doni magnitudinem discat.—(S. Chrysost., Homil. ad pop. Antioch.)

in which the Church dispensed with public confession, it required from the penitent only a mental confession in which he gave an account of his conduct to God alone, without it being necessary to enumerate his sins to a priest, a condition which Chrysostom would not have omitted, if auricular confession had been established and considered as sacramental, and, consequently, indispensable.

We may even remark that sinners approach the holy table without having made any confession, public or private, of their crimes. It was sufficient to have conceived within one's mind a profound and sincere repentance worthily to fulfil this duty. This is evidently demonstrated by the passage in which Saint Chrysostom explains these words of the apostle: "Let man try his own conscience, and so let him eat of this bread and drink of this cup." "He does not order," adds this interpreter, "to try each other mutually, but every one to examine and try himself in the absence of every witness."\* We find the same doctrine taught in another passage of his writings: "The apostle has not laid bare the ulcer, he has not summoned the sinner before the eyes of the public,

\* Non jubet alteri alterum probare, sed sic se ipsum, faciens judicium privatum et probationem quæ careat testimonibus.—(S. Chrysost., Homil. 28, in Corinth.)

he did not bring forth witnesses; he gives only conscience for a judge, in presence of God, who sees all things, examines hearts, weighs sins in the scales of equity, and pronounces after having made the examination of his life. Deliver yourself from sin, reform your conduct, and approach thus, with a pure conscience, the holy table, and partake of the sacrifice.”\*

The same doctrine was then professed in the East: in the edification of the faithful, a public penance was demanded for public crimes; but, for secret ones, repentance and private satisfaction. “Jesus Christ has remitted to yourselves satisfaction for the faults committed after baptism; he has left you as judge of them, that you may not require to have recourse to a priest in need; but he has left you as master, according to your own conscience and discernment, to remedy your own errors within yourselves, and to wash away your sins by repentance.”†

\* Apostolus non revelavit ulcus, non in communen theatrum accusationem produxit, non delictorum testes statuit: intus in conscientia, adstante nemine, praeter eum qui cuncta videt, Deum, qui scrutatur et de peccatis judicat, et omnium vitam quasi lance quadam librat judicium peccatorum statuens, et vitam omnem recogitans in mentis judicium. Peccata deducito, reforma quod deliquisti, ac sic pura conscientia sacram attinge mensam, particeps sacri sacrificii fias.—(S Chrysost., Homil. 8, de Pœnit.)

† Post baptismia remedium in te ijs statuit, remissionem

Saint Hilary, in speaking of the confession which David made to God of his transgressions, adds: "He teaches us that we must confess to none but to Him who has made the olive fruitful by the hope of His mercy for ever and ever."\*

Saint Augustin, that light of the Church, reproves every kind of confession made to men. "What need have I that men should hear my confession, as if they could give any remedy for all my transgressions?"† He explained himself as formally when he said to the people in one of his homilies: "Believe for certain that man cannot remit sins."‡

Cassianus informs us, in the following passage, that this same doctrine was received in Egypt:— "Who is there that cannot simply say, I have let you know my sin, and I have not concealed my

in arbitrio tuo posuit, ut non quæras sacerdotem, cum necessitas flagitaverit: sed ipse jam ac si scitus perspicuusque magister, errorem tuum intra te emendes, et peccatum tuum penitudine abluas.—(Laurentius, episc. Novariens., Hom. de Pœnit., Bibl. Patr., t. ii.)

\* Nulli alii docens esse confitendum, quam qui fecit olivam fructiferam spe misericordiæ in seculum seculi.—(Hilar., in Psalm, 51.)

† Quid mihi est cum hominibus, ut audiant confessiones meas, quasi ipsi sanaturi sint omnes languores meos?—(August. Confess., lib. x., c. 3.)

‡ Tenete quia homo non potest peccata dimittree.—(August., Homil. 23, c. 8.)

iniquities?" It is after this avowal that he may exclaim with confidence, "And you have remitted the impiety of my heart." If then shame prevent you from making this revelation before men, make it to Him from whom you can conceal nothing; do not cease to entreat your Judge who is accustomed to remit sins, without your being obliged to publish what causes your shame, and without exposing yourself to reproach and insult."\*

Saint Basil shares the opinion of the fathers we have just quoted, when he says in opposing the heretics: "If the power of remitting sins has been attributed to no one, as is certain, God alone can remit them."†

It is evident that confession is obligatory and valid only when it is made to God, because he alone is able to remit sins—a power that is given to no individual, as Tertullian observes: "Who remits sins," says he, "but God alone? He certainly remits moral sins committed against Him and against His temple. . . . But, if He had

\* *Quis est qui non possit simpliciter dicere: peccatum meum tibi cognitum feci, et injuriam meum non operui? ut per hanc confessionem etiam illud confidenter subjungere mereatur: et tu remisisti iniquitatem cordis mei. Quod si verecundia retrahente revelare ea coram hominibus erubescis, illi, quem latere non possunt, confiteri ea iugi supplicatione non desinas.*—(Cassianus, Collat. 2, c. 8.)

† *Si ergo nullius est peccata dimittere, sicut certe nullius est, nisi solius Dei.*—(Basil. cont. Eunom., lib. v.)

granted a power of this nature to His apostles, it is certain that it would proceed from God, but not from man. It would be a rule of discipline, and not a right of power. Show me, then, you who are an apostle (he is addressing Pope Zeno), some prophetic proofs, then will I acknowledge your divine power, and you also may attribute to yourself the faculty of remitting my transgressions. But if you only pretend to a right of discipline, without having that of commanding imperiously, how can you pardon, you who are neither a prophet nor an apostle, and deprived of that faculty with which they are endowed? I inquire how, according to your own opinion, you can usurp this right of the Church? If the Lord said to Peter: ‘Upon this rock will I build my church; I have given thee the keys of the heavenly kingdom, and whatever you loosen on earth shall be unbound in heaven,’ you conclude that it belongs to you to bind and loosen—that is, it belongs to the Church of Saint Peter—you overthrow and destroy the manifest intention of the Lord, who gave this virtue personally to Peter: thus you do not possess the right that was given to him.”\*

Saint Ambrosius says expressly that men have not the right to remit sins: “Men lend their

\* *Quis remittit delicta nisi solus Deus? et utique mortalia quae in ipsum fuerint admissa et in templum ejus—itaque si*

ministry in the remission of sins, but not as having a right to absolve. They pray, and God pardons.”\*

Irenœus, very anterior to the fathers we have just quoted, professed the same doctrine, as is proved by the following words: “Christ used to absolve men from their sins, and to cure them. He thus manifested who he was; for no one can remit sins but God alone.”†

*ipos beatos apostolos tale aliquid indulsisse constaret, cuius venia a Deo non ab homine competenteret, non ex disciplina, sed ex potestate fecisse. Exhibi igitur et nunc mihi apostolice, prefetica exempla, et ignoscam divinitatem, et vindica tibi delictorum remittendorum potestatem. Quod si disciplinæ solius officia sortitus es, nec imperio præsidere, sed ministerio, quis aut quantus es indulgere, qui neque prophetam, nec apostolum exhibens, cares a virtute cuius est indulgere....De tua nunc sententia quæro unde hoc jus Ecclesiæ usurpes. Si quia dixerit Petro Dominus: Super hanc petram cœdificabo meam, tibi dedi clavem regni cœlestis, vel: Quæcumque alligaveris vel solveris in terra, erunt alligata vel soluta in cœlis, idcirco prosumis et ad te derivasse solvendi et alligandi potestatem, id est, ad omnem Ecclesiam Petri propinquam: qualis es evertens atque commutans manifestam Domini intentionem personaliiter hoc Petro conferentem....A Deoque nihil ad delicta fidelium capitalia potestas solvendi et alligandi Petro emancipata. (Tertull., de Pudicit., c. 21.)*

\* Homines in remissionem peccatorum ministerium suum exhibentes, non jus alicujus potestatis exercent; isti rogant, Divinitas donat. (S. Ambr., lib. ix, c. 18, de Spiritu Sancto.)

† Christus peccata remittens hominem quidem curavit; semetipsum autem manifest ostendit quis esset. Si autem

Lastly, this doctrine, in spite of the efforts of the popes, their bulls and decrees, and notwithstanding the prescriptions of the bishops and clergy, never ceased to be acknowledged till the thirteenth century, when auricular confession was converted into a dogma at the council of Latram, in 1215, at the instigation of Pope Innocent III. This is what is proved by several documents; among others, by the writings of Peter of Lombardy, and those of Gratian. The former, after asking himself this question, “Is it sufficient to confess to God alone or to a priest?” replies, “some have believed it is sufficient to confess to God alone, without submitting oneself to the judgment of the priest, and without confessing in the church;” and after having produced, in support of this opinion, the testimony of scripture and that of the fathers, he adds—“It is upon these authorities that they build, who maintain it is sufficient to confess one’s sins to God, without a priest; for, say they, if any one fear to reveal his faults before men, for fear of opprobrium, or lest others, from his example, should be inclined to sin, and, for these reasons, he holds his peace before men, and reveals his sin to God alone, he will, nevertheless, obtain his pardon.”\*

nemo potest remittere peccata, nisi solus Deus, etc. (Iren., lib. ii, c. 17.)

\* Utrum sufficiat peccata confiteri soli Deo, an oportet confiteri sacerdoti? Quibusdam visum est sufficere, si soit

The same opinion was maintained, previous to the period of which we have just spoken, by those even who had examined and compiled that trashy medley of discipline regulations, and imperative laws of which the Catholic code was composed. Thus Gratian, after having put the question, in the very beginning of his treatise on penitence, "whether any one can satisfy God in secret by the confession of the heart alone, without the confession of the mouth," replies, "there are persons who hold that all may deserve pardon for their sins without church-confession, and the judgment of the priest;" and he adds, after producing the different opinions upon this subject, "but to which must we rather adhere?" This we must leave to the option and judgment of the reader, because both opinions have found defenders among wise religious men."\*

Deo fiat confessio sine judicio sacerdotali et confessione Ecclesiæ...His autoribus innituntur, qui sufficere contendunt Deo confiteri peccata sine sacerdote. Dicunt enim quod si quis timens detegere culpam suam apud homines, ne inde opprobrio habeatur, vel alii suo exemplo ad peccandum accingentur, et adeo tacet homini et revelat Deo, consequitur veniam. (Lombard, Distinct., lib. iv, §17.)

\* Utrum sola cordis contritione et secreta satisfactione, absque oris confessione, quisquam possit Deo satisfacere? Sunt enim qui dicunt quemlibet criminis veniam sine confessione Ecclesiæ et sacerdotali judicio posse promovere. Cui autem horum potius adhærendum sit, lectoris judicio reservatur. Utraqui enim habet fautores sapientes et religiosos. (Grat., de Poenit., c. 89.)

Let us add, moreover, to these testimonies, that of a bishop who lived in the sixth century. He thus expresses the prevailing opinion of his time—“It follows that God has made you judge and arbitrator; he has given you intelligence, in order that you may discern by yourself good and evil; that is, what is good, and what is sin. He has given you the remedy after baptism, and has made you your own master to obtain absolution by yourself, without having recourse to a priest, in a case of necessity. Being sufficiently enlightened on this subject, correct your errors within yourselves, and wash out your sins by penitence.”\*

We see from the council of Châlons, held in 813, that the doctrine of that period admitted equally the validity of confession, whether it was made to God or to a priest. The thirty-third canon of that council is thus worded: “Some say that they ought to confess their sins to God alone; others think they must confess to priests. Either is done

\* Exinde te ipsum statuit in judicem et arbitrium; dedit tibi notitiam, ut possis exte discernere bonum et malum, id est inter meritum et peccatum. Post baptisma remedium tuum in te ipso statuit, remissionem in arbitrio tuo posuit, ut non quæras sacerdotem, cum necessitas flagitavit. Sed ipse ac si scitus perspicunsque magister, errorem tuum intra te emendes, et peccatum tuum pœnitudine abluas, (Laurentius Novarens., episcop., Homil. i, Bib. Patr., t ii. p. 129.)

with much profit; but only on condition of confessing our sins to God, who has the power of remitting them . . . This is why confession made to God purges away sins, and made to the priest teaches us how we may obtain pardon.”\*

The doctrine of the fathers and that of the council, such as we have just exposed them, were conformable to that of the Gospel, where we do not find even an allusion to auricular confession, but where it is expressly stated that the right of absolution belongs to God alone. It would indeed be very surprising if God, after having made auricular confession a sacrament, and given to man the power of blotting out sins, had omitted to prescribe it in a clear and precise manner; for this is the character which even human laws ought to assume; how much more so those which come from God? A law is binding only when it is intelligible.

We ought to remark, that when the Scribes, scandalised that Jesus Christ should pardon sins, exclaimed in his presence: “Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” Jesus replied: “Is it easier to say to a paralytic, your sins are forgiven, than to say, arise, take up your bed, and walk? Know

\* Confessio ideo quæ Deo fit, purgat peccata; ea vero qua sacerdoti fit, docet qualiter ipsa purgentur peccata. Deus namque salutis et sanitatis auctor et largitor.—(Can. 33.)

that the Son of Man has power upon earth to forgive sins.”\* If this power were to be granted to priests, Jesus Christ would not have attributed it to himself alone. He demanded neither a secret confession, made to the priest, nor a public confession; but he required an avowal, as essentially connected with a sincere repentance, and as being the token, or most certain proof able to be given to men, of a real return to virtue. This confession, as we shall show in the next chapter, was practised indifferently among all the faithful, who, in this circumstance, prayed to God for one another, in order that forgiveness might be vouchsafed unto them, as the following passage, in the Epistle of Saint James, plainly indicates: “Confess your faults to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be saved; for the constant prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”†

An evident proof that Jesus Christ did not attach to the forgiveness of transgressions a confession of the kind imagined by the chiefs of Christianity is, that he never exacted such an act on any occasion when he forgave sins: it is said in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew that Jesus, seeing the faith of those who brought to him one sick of the palsy, said to him,

\* Marc., c. 2, v. 7 & 10.

† Jacob., Epist., c. 5, v. 16.

"Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee."\* He required only faith and love toward himself, as we see again in the example of the adulteress, to whom he says: "Your numerous sins are forgiven, because you loved much."† Are we to think that Jesus Christ, before he pardoned the numerous sins of this woman, made her whisper in his ear all the details of the vices of which she had been guilty, as our young priests, who have just left their seminary, now do with women of the same description? Such are, however, the monstrous results of the corruption of Christianity. Theologians agree that venial sins are forgiven by God without there being any need of sacerdotal confession; it is, then, absurd to say that he cannot or will not pardon mortal sins without the ministry of the priest, for that would be to suppose his impotency.

If auricular confession had entered into the views of the founder of the Christian religion, he would have prescribed it to his Apostles; now, this is what he did not do, for they never asked it of anybody. They followed the example of the forerunner of Jesus Christ; they baptised and forgave the sins of those who flocked towards

\* Matth., c. 9, v. 2, et Marc., c. 2, v. 7 & 10.

† Luke, c. 7, v. 43.

them. Indeed it was thus, according to Saint Matthew, that John acted: “Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan; and they were baptised by him, confessing their sins.”\* This is also what the Christians practised, as we see from the Acts of the Apostles: “And many of those who had believed came to confess, and declare the evil they had done.”†

Jesus Christ, when he said to his disciples that whosesoever sins they forgave should be forgiven unto them, and whosesoever they retained should be retained unto them, did not transmit to them a right which belongs to him alone; for divine justice must be satisfied, either in this life or in the next, by decrees emanating directly from itself, but could not be so by the judgment of men, too finite to search the recesses of hearts, and too subject to error to pronounce upon the happiness or misery of their fellows. It is therefore evident that Jesus Christ intended by the words we have just quoted, only a temporary power, which every association, civil or religious, enjoys—that of pardoning and becoming reconciled with those who have offended it or violated the precepts of the law. No law, no human convention, can ever stop or modify the decrees of Providence. Thus, the

\* Matth., c. 3, v. 6.      † Act., c. 19, v. 18.

faults or crimes which obtain forgiveness from the magistrate, the sovereign, or from individuals, will receive a punishment according to divine judgment; for their authors must satisfy divine justice in some way or other. So that the power which priests have attributed to themselves of forgiving sins in present and future life is contrary to the doctrine of Jesus Christ, as well as to the power and justice of God.

If Jesus Christ had wished to establish auricular confession, he would have expressed it in a manner so much more clear and precise, as this practice was but little known among the Jews or even Gentiles, and was practised only on very rare occasions; whereas the simple and sincere avowal of one's faults, the acknowledgment of them made to the persons offended, to one's judges, neighbours, and fellow-believers, is an act of repentance conformable to the rules of morality, and has been practised among all civilised nations. It is also the only interpretation that can be given to the words that have been just quoted. We plainly see that Jesus Christ ordained baptism and Easter, and that he observed and practised both, as did also his apostles and their immediate successors: whereas auricular confession was totally unknown to them. How could they have listened to each inhabitant of a city privately and individually, at a time when they were so few in number; whereas

whole populations presented themselves in crowds to confess their sins and ask pardon of God? The apostles did not even require a confession or public acknowledgment of their faults. Their mere presence was a sufficient proof of their repentance and faith. Paul speaks, in several parts of his writings, of the duties and attributes of priests; he would not have failed to mention auricular confession, had it been instituted by Jesus Christ. Lastly, a direct pardon, without any intermediary, from God, is specified in the most precise manner in the prayer dictated by Jesus Christ, in which he commands us to implore his clemency, by daily addressing him in these words: *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.*

Auricular confession has also been supported by that passage in St. Matthew, in which Jesus Christ says to Peter: "I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." But, by interpreting these words in the sense which the Catholics attributed to them, it would follow that Peter, or, if they will, the popes, whom they aver to have succeeded him, would have exclusively received the power of admitting Christians into paradise or of excluding them; for Jesus Christ gave this privilege to Peter alone, since he addressed only him, and not his other apostles, who, however, were present. But the Church does not admit this interpretation, since it has given to all priests a power

which Jesus Christ granted only to Peter—that of opening or shutting the gates of heaven. These anomalies prove that auricular confession, unknown to the earlier Christians, was the work of the popes and councils.

How does it happen that we find no mention of auricular confession in the acts of the councils of Europe, Asia, and Africa, nor in those writings relative to the Christian religion which appeared in the early ages of the Church; whereas, since Innocent III., there are scarcely any that do not speak of this confession and recommend it as a divine institution? We see nowhere that, in the peril of death, or in times of persecution, they ever had recourse to confession, as was the case according to this institution, and as we find numerous instances of it, especially in the accounts of the missionaries. The faith and fervour of the earlier Christians were based upon principles far more conformable to the spirit of Christianity than is a fruitless practice of routine. This is, according to Tertullian, the way in which they prepared for death, in times of persecution: “The Church then is aghast; faith becomes more vigilant in its doctrines, more assiduous in the practice of fasting and in its other duties, in prayer, humility, charity, holiness, sobriety.” \*

\* *Tunc ecclesia in attonito est. Tunc et fides in expedi-*

Are we to believe that the Pagans, among the numerous accusations they brought against the Christians, would not have reproached them with having established a practice of which no public example had been seen before that period? Would they not have rebelled against an institution which would have shocked their pride, which allowed the priest to meddle with the most intimate secrets of the conscience, with those of families, those of the state, and which attributed to him a power that nobody can share with God? Would they have remained silent about a new practice which they would have considered as absurd and tyrannical? But this is what could not happen, since it did not exist in those times, either in theory or in practice.

If the Church, which called itself the only orthodox one, had admitted auricular confession as divine institution, would it not have reproached the numerous sects which arose in the earliest ages of Christianity with the non-observance of a practice obligatory upon all Christians? We do not find, however, this reproach in any of the numerous controversial writings which the sects published against one another, which has often

tione sollicitior, et disciplinatior in jejuniis et stationibus, et oratione et humilitate in alterutra diligentior, et in dilectione in sanctitate et sobrietate.—(Tertull., de Fuga in persecut., c. 1.)

happened since the Catholics have made auricular confession an article of faith.

If this practice had been anciently known, it is evident that the fathers of the church and the theologians of those times would have ordered and recommended it, not only at Easter, but also on the grand festivals, or solemnities, instituted by the Church. But we find no trace of any such obligation; whereas the dogmatical or ascetic writers who have appeared since Innocent III. are not satisfied with rendering it obligatory, at least once a year, but they recommend frequent confession and communion as a pledge of salvation.

Lastly, we find no miracle in antiquity that proves the institution of auricular confession to have emanated from a divine prescription; whereas the history of less remote ages offers us a sufficiently great number, which it is useless to enumerate here. It has been frequently seen that, when it was requisite that any new opinion or belief should be received and adopted, they had recourse to miracles as a sure means of succeeding without meeting with any obstacles.

---

## CHAPTER V.

### RECIPROCAL CONFESSiON BETWEEN LAYMEN AMONG THE CHRISTIANS; ORIGIN OF SACER- DOTAL AND SACRAMENTAL CONFESSiON.

---

WE have spoken of confession made to God alone, as well as of that which was practised publicly; let us now say a few words about that which took place between laymen, between one individual to another; three kinds of confession in which the presence of the priests was not necessary. The latter united with the people in public confession, and were the organs through which the admission of a sinner to the penance or to the forgiveness granted by the Church, was declared. The confession of one individual to another was as expressly recommended for ordinary sins as public confession was

for heavy crimes. This is what is proved by several passages of Scripture, as well as by the opinions of the fathers of the church: this is what Saint James teaches expressly, when he says: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed."\* The earlier Christians thought that a man could not repent sincerely of his faults, if he refused, through a feeling of pride or self-love, to avow it. It was, moreover, an act of humility inherent in the doctrine of Jesus Christ, and an occasion of exercising charity towards him who had offended—a condition necessary for participating in the mysteries. "First go and be reconciled with your brother," says St. Matthew, "and then come and offer thy gift upon the altar."† St. Luke confirms this precept when he says: "If thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, 'I repent;' thou shalt forgive him."‡ They thought it was conformable to sincerity and loyalty to anticipate an accusation they might have the right to make, as Saint Ambrosius observes: "Be beforehand with your accuser; you will not fear they will accuse you if you accuse yourself. To do thus will give

\* Jacob., Epist., cap. 5, v. 16.

† Matth., c. 5, v. 24.

‡ Luc., c. 17, v. 3, 4.

you life after death.”\* It is also said in the Gospel, that God forgives us the sins we have committed, as we forgive our neighbour. We find the same doctrine in the prayer especially recommended by Jesus Christ. Ecclesiastical history offers us, moreover, several instances in which the confession of one layman to another took place independently of the priest. This practice proves evidently that auricular confession, as it has been instituted by the popes and councils, was long unknown among Christians. We shall prove, in another chapter, that the remission of sins was obtained, independently of confession, by the practice of good works, by prayer, alms, fasting, &c.

Saint Thomas, considered confession made to a layman as sacramental, and able to serve instead of sacerdotal confession. The former, after comparing confession to baptism, adds: “A layman can, in cases of necessity, fulfil the ministry of a priest; so that one can confess to him.”† Gerson is of the same opinion when he says: “Confession may be made, in a case of necessity, as in the danger of death, to one who is

\* *Præveni accusatorem tuum; si te ipsum accusaveris, accusatorem nullum timebis: si te detuleris ipse, etsi mortuus fueris, revivisces.*—(Ambro., lib. ii, de Pœnit., c. 7.)

† *In necessitate etiam laicus vicem sacerdotis supplet, ut ei confessio fieri possit.*—(S. Thom. in Suppl., 9, 8, art. 2.)

not a priest."\* We find in ecclesiastical history several examples of confessions made to laymen. The commentary on the chapter *Fures* says also, —*in necessitate etiam laicus*. A proof that this confession was considered as valid as that made to the priest is, that it was admitted to be sacramental,† and equally obligatory: it follows that, if confession to a layman is sufficient to remit sins in certain cases, it must produce the same effect in all circumstances, wherever perfect contrition is found to be on one side, and an equally sincere pardon on the other.

The three kinds of confession of which we have spoken having fallen into disuse through the encroachment of the clergy, or the scandal occasioned by public confession, people confined themselves to a secret avowal of their sins, in presence either of a layman or of a priest; but ultimately the Church attributed to itself alone the right of examining consciences and giving a forgiveness which belongs only to God.

Public confession had been established and had long been preserved among the Christians, from

\* Poterit tamen confessio in necessitate, ut in periculo mortis, coram non sacerdoti fieri.—(In compend. theolog., tit. de Sacram. pœnit., tit. Quid in confess.)

† Si talis confessio est intentione pœnitentis, est sacramentalis.

the conviction that the dread of a public avowal would deter men from vice. "There is nothing so pernicious to sin," says Saint Chrysostom, "as the obligation of avowing it."\* But this motive is more specious than real, because corrupt men have too much interest to dissemble their conduct, and, moreover, they exacted, in public confession, only an avowal of crimes of public notoriety. It was this reason, and especially the scandal which resulted from the manifestation of certain sins, that caused it to be abolished. A deacon, known by the name of Nectarius, having confessed publicly an intrigue he had had with a Roman lady, occasioned so much scandal that the clergy, to avoid in future the discredit which such confessions might bring upon them, abolished public confession. Another imperative reason was also the fear of scaring away from Christianity certain persons who dreaded lest they might hurt their reputation, or their interests, by unveiling their conduct to the public. "The sins of those who come forward for penance," says Saint Leo, "are not always of a nature not to dread publicity. We must, therefore, lay aside this custom, which cannot, on this account, be approved of, in order not to drive away a great many persons who blush

\* *Nihil tam exitiale peccato, quam peccati accusatio.*—(Chrysost., Homil. 42, de Lazaro.)

to avow their faults, or who fear to unfold their conduct to their enemies, and to be exposed to the vengeance of the laws.”\*

Although the clergy had put a stop to public confession in the churches, this custom was preserved and even perpetuated for a very long time in monasteries of either sex; for the heads of those establishments, who had unlimited power over their community, preserved a practice that rendered them absolute masters of the acts and even the thoughts of their subordinates; they even reserved to themselves the right of alone hearing confessions, when the use of auricular confession began to be introduced. Saint Basil, who composed a treatise on monastic life, required that every friar should make his confession in presence of all his fellows. “The fault one has committed must not remain secret, but each ought to declare it in presence of all, in order that he who has fallen into evil may be healed by prayer in common.”†

\* Tamen non omnium hujusce modi sunt peccata, ut ea qui pœnitentiam poscunt, non timeant publicare. Removetur tam improbabilis consuetudo, ne multi a pœnitentia remediis arceantur, dum aut erubescunt, aut metuunt inimicis suis sua facta reserare, quibus possunt legum constitutione percelli.—(S. Leon., Epist., 80, ad Episc. Campgn.)

† Admissum delictum nullo modo occultum teneo, sed in medium audientibus cunctis enunciat, ut per communem orationem sanatus morbus illius qui in hujus morbi malum incidit.—(Basil., de Instit. monarch.)

Crodegongus, bishop of Metz, informs us that this usage was observed in his time, both in monasteries and among canons. "Both, after matins, used to meet together and make their confession in common, after which they would sing fifty psalms."\* If sacerdotal confession had been established at a time when the monastic rules of different orders were formed, it would have been prescribed in them; but this is what we never find in them. We must even remark that it was uncommon to meet with a single priest in these monasteries. The Pauls, Antonies, Pacoms, Hilarions, Gregories, Ambrosiuses, Chrysostoms, Jeromes, and Augustins never went to confess at the feet of a priest.

Confession between laymen, which consisted in reciprocally declaring and pardoning one another's sins, without any formula of pardon, differed from confession made to a priest, inasmuch as the latter made a sign of pardon by the imposition of hands, as they had been accustomed to do in public confession,—a usage which has been handed down among monastic orders of both sexes, and has been preserved till the present day with the modifica-

\* Dabant confessiones suas dicentes, confiteor Domino et tibi, frater, quod peccavi in cognitione, et opere, propterea, prœcor te, ora pro me; et ille respondet: Misereatur omnipotens Deus, etc.—(Crodegongus metensis, in Regula Canon, cap. 18.)

tions introduced by the establishment of sacerdotal and sacramental confession. We even see that the abbesses confessed their nuns and even men, and laid their hands on them,—an encroachment upon the province of priests which was forbidden, as the following Capitulary of Charlemagne declares. “We have been informed that certain abbesses, contrary to the usage of the holy Church, bless, impose hands, and make the sign of the cross upon the heads of men, and that they give the veil to virgins with the sacerdotal benediction. Know, most holy fathers, that you ought, each of you in your parish, to forbid it.”\*

A council, held in Paris in 824, complains that women gave the communion to the people. As at the period in question, confession was confined to a general avowal of culpability, without any particular specification of sins; we may conceive that the abbesses, who had attributed to themselves the right of confession belonging without distinction to all Christians, had, considering their sacred character, seized upon the prerogative enjoyed by the priests, that of the imposition of hands

\* Auditum est aliquas abbatissas, contra morem sanctæ Dei Ecclesiæ, benedictionem et manus impositiones et signacula sanctæ crucis, super capite virorum dare, nec non et velare virgines cum benedictione sacerdotali. Quod omne a vobis, sanctissimi patres, in vestris parœciis illis interdicendum esse, scitote. (Charol.-Mag. cap. 76, lib. i.)

after having secured confession : this custom is by no means surprising, when we find five abbesses sitting in the council of Beaconsfield, in England, held in 694, and put on the same footing as ecclesiastics;\* when the abbesses of Fontevrault, or Remirement, had ecclesiastical privileges ; when the nun of Las Hualgas, in the city of Burgos, exercised episcopal jurisdiction over twelve convents and fifty villages, and took upon herself to assemble synods, to preach, and to confess.†

The imposition of hands, which at first was but a formula or ceremony, became in the monasteries an absolution as efficacious as it is in auricular confession, not only for trifling faults, as is the case in these days, but also for sins against the commandments of God and the Church. These abbesses, doubtless comparing themselves to the bishops, had even attributed to themselves the right of appointing a substitute to replace them in the exercise of these functions. We find in the compilation of the ancient monastic regulations, by Holstenius, a rule for virgins, wherein he indicates, chapter 6, *de assidua confessione*, three portions of the day in which the nuns confessed their sins without being able to dispense with it. The abbess had the right

\* Labbe, t. vi, p. 1356.

† Chronique religieuse. In 80, Paris, 1820, t. v, p. 452, and *Espana Sagrad.*, t. xxvi.

of reserving to herself cases of conscience, and was to be consulted by her delegates when any difficulty arose.\*

This usage, in spite of the frequent prohibitions of the popes, was long continued, since we find that Innocent III. forbade the abbesses of Spain to confess their nuns, or to preach before the public. "We have heard, very lately, not without astonishment," says this pope, in one of his letters, "that the abbesses of the dioceses of Valencia and Burgos give benediction to their nuns, and that they even hear their confession for mortal sins."† The reason of this prohibition is grounded upon the Holy Virgin's never having fulfilled any of these functions. The motive alleged by Innocent III. doubtless had not sufficient weight upon the minds of women to make them abandon a right which they had heretofore enjoyed. And indeed we have learned from the registers of the Bastille, that a woman, named Jeanne Charlotte Bazachin, was confined in that prison of state in 1747, for having fulfilled a sacerdotal ministry by confessing several women, several Jansenist nuns.‡

It would have been difficult, at a period when people were acquainted with no other confession

\* Holstenius, Cod. regul., *regula ejusdem ad virginem.*

† Decretal., ch. 9.

‡ Dulaure, Hist. de Paris.

than a public or reciprocal one, to persuade laymen that a confession made to priests alone was sacramental and obligatory. But we can conceive that the clergy, by the ascendancy they enjoyed in times of ignorance and barbarism, succeeded in time, and by taking certain precautions, in dissuading laymen from a practice of which they had been long in possession; and in making them believe that confession was valid only when heard by a priest,—that they alone had the power of remitting sins. They acknowledged at first that confession was valid when, for want of a priest, it was made to a layman; later, the priest might be replaced by the deacon. At length, the priest remained alone, and by divine institution, was gifted with the power of remitting or retaining sins. We even find that in the time of Saint Cyprian, the deacon was authorised, in default of a priest, to perform the functions exercised by the latter in public penance. “I think if our brethren and those who have received certificates from the martyrs, happen to be sick or in imminent danger, they ought not to await our presence, but apply to any priest who may present himself; if none be found, to the deacons, who may, in a case of necessity, receive the sinner’s confession and repentance, and perform the imposition of hands, in order that he may go in peace to the Lord.”\* A council held in London in 1200,

\* Occurrente puto fratribus nostris, ut qui libellos a mar-

attributes to deacons, concurrently with priests, two faculties which, before that period, had belonged indistinctly to all Christians—namely, the administering of baptism and the pardoning of sins. “We wish that it be not lawful to deacons to administer baptism or penance, except a case of necessity when the priest either would not, or could not, and a child or a parent might be in imminent danger of death.”\*

The same doctrine was maintained later by theologians of much weight in the Church, such as Bede, Peter the Lombard, Saint Thomas, and even by the councils; which would not have been the case, had they considered auricular confession made to a priest as sacramental and obligatory. Indeed, were it so, there is no reason or necessity that could dispense with that obligation. It would have been the same with confession as with ordination; in the latter sacrament, an individual cannot be ordained priest, or bishop, by laymen,

tyribus acceperunt, si incommodo aliquo et infirmitate percusso occupati fuerint, non expesterit præsentiam nostram, cum apud præbyterium quemcunque præsentem, vel si præbyter repertus non fuerit, et urgeri exitus cæperit, apud diaconum exomolesim facere delicti possint, ut manus ei in pœnitentiam impositæ, veniat ad Dominum cum pace.—(Cyprian, lib. iii., epist. 17.)

\* Adjiciimus ut non liceat diaconibus baptizare, vel pœnitencias dare, nisi dupli necessitate, videlicet quis sacerdos non potest, vel etiam stulte non vult, et mors imminet puero vel ægroto.

under any circumstances, or from any motive of necessity whatsoever. Ordination has in all times been considered as null in the latter case, whereas confession, accompanied by a sincere repentance, has been admitted by the Church, in the former case, as valid and sufficient for the remission of sins. "If there be a pressing necessity," says Alcuin, "and no priest present, let the deacon receive the repentance of the sick person, and give the holy communion."\*

This is what Bede taught in the eighth century. Pierre Cauton, a doctor of the faculty of theology of Paris, trusting to this opinion and that of Saint Augustin, thus expresses himself in his treatise on the sacraments: "We think, according to these authorities, that one ought, in case of necessity, and in default of priests, to confess one's sins to a layman, and not only venial but also mortal sins." He afterwards quotes Bede, as follows: "Confession is so necessary, that we must, in danger of death, confess our sins to anybody, except, however, to a Jew, a Pagan, or one evidently a heretic."† Peter the Lombard shares the same opinion

\* Alcuinus lib. de Div officio.

† Sed hoc forte dictum est in usu ubi sacerdos haberi non potest...sic enim tantæ necessitatis est confessio, quod si deest sacerdos confitendum sit cuicunque in mortis periculo, sed nunquam judæo, vel gentili, vel hœretico manifesto. (Pierre Cauton, Summ. Sacram. p. 203.)

when he says: "The power of confession is so great, that, in default of a priest, one must confess to one's neighbour; for it often happens that the penitent cannot, notwithstanding his desire, confess to a priest, his present time and place not permitting; and if he to whom he confesses has not the power of remitting sins, the penitent who makes to a layman a confession of a shameful crime is worthy of pardon from the desire he has of applying to a priest.\* Saint Thomas, whose authority has so much weight in the Catholic Church, has proclaimed the same doctrine: "The priest is the official minister of confession," says he; "but in a case of necessity, the layman can perform the sacerdotal function, and one may confess to him."† Cardinal Hostiensis goes still further; for he grants the same right to women, as we find in the following passage: "But, as Saint Augustin says,

\* Tanta vis est confessionis, ut si deest sacerdos, confiteatur proximo; saepe enim contingit quod pœnitens non potest confiteri coram sacerdote, quem desideranti, nec locus, nec tempus offert. Et ei ille cui confitebitur, potestatem solvendi non habet, sit tamen dignus ex sacerdotis desiderio, qui socio confitetur turpitudinem criminis.—(P. Lomb., Sent. 4, dis. 17.)

† Ministerio pœnitentiae cui confessio facienda et officio est sacerdos; sed in necessitate etiam laicus vicem sacerdotis supplet ut ei confessio fieri potest.—(Thom. sent. in dist. 17, 9, 3, art. 3.)

the power of confession is so great, that, whenever there is any danger, and one desires to confess, whether being ill, in imminent danger of death, or in warfare, when the hour of battle is approaching, and no priest is at hand, one may, under such circumstances, confess one's sins to a layman, and even to a woman, if one cannot have recourse to a man."\*

What we have advanced in this chapter, as well as in the preceding ones, supporting it by proofs, is found to be confirmed by the second council of Châlons, held in 813. The canon of that council, which we are about to cite, proves evidently that auricular sacerdotal confession was unknown at that period, and that it was supposed to be sufficient to confess one's sins to God alone, and that He alone had the power of remitting them; lastly, that people were accustomed to confess to laymen, and if they applied to a priest, it was only to conform to the discipline of the Church as to the manner of doing penance. Thus does the council lay down this doctrine.

\* Quia sicut ait Augustinus tanta est vis confessionis, quod si immineat necessitatis articulus, vel quia infirmatur ad mortem is qui vult confiteri, vel oportet eum intrare bellum, et deest sacerdos, non solum proprius, sed quilibet: in tali articulo potest etiam laico, vel etiam mulieri, si non adsit aliis confiteri.—(Card. Host., Summa, lib. v., tit. de Pœnit., n. 4.)

"Some say that they ought to confess their sins to God alone; others think they must confess them to a priest. Either may be done to the great advantage of holy Church; but this only in case we should confess our sins to God, who remits sins, and should say with David: '*I have acquainted you with my sin, and have not concealed my injustice; I cried,—I will confess to the Lord the iniquities of which I am guilty, and you have remitted the impiety of my crime;*' and, according to the institution of the apostle, '*Let us confess our sins to one another, and let us pray for one another, that we may be saved.*' For this reason the confession that is made to God cleanses from sins, and that which is made to the priest teaches us how we ought to do penance for our sins, for God is the author and giver of salvation and holiness, and he grants a dispensation for them, now by the effect of the invisible power with which he governs, now by making use of physicians to cure the evil."\*

\* Quia quidam solum modum Deo confiteri debere dicunt peccata, quidem vero sacerdotibus confitenda esse percensent, quod utrumque non sine magno fructu in sanctam ecclesiam; ita duntaxat ut et Deo qui remissor est peccatorum, confiteamur peccata nostra, et cum David dicamus: *Delictum meum tibi cognitum feci, et injustitiam meam non abscondi; dixi: Confitebor adversum me injustitiam meam Domino, et tu remisisti impietatem peccati mei.* Et secundum institutionem apostoli, *Confiteamur in alterutrum peccata nostra, et orenus*

Penitence granted by deacons, which has been since taxed with heresy, was acknowledged by the Church in the twelfth century. We see this in the transactions of the council of Embrun, held in 1194: "We have forbidden deacons, except in cases of severe and urgent necessity, to baptize, or to administer the body of Jesus Christ, or to shrive any who would avow his faults, as had been decreed by the canons of our predecessors and by antiquity."

Sacramental confession was, in the eleventh century, an institution so vague and arbitrary, that the layman reported to the priest the confession he had heard, and did the penance assigned for the sins of the deceased; here is what is found in an old chronicle quoted by Carpentier: "The suppliant led him outside (the house of the wounded man), admonishing him concerning his salvation, and entreating him, for the honour of God, to confess his sins, and not to die without confession; saying, that if he would confess to him, he engaged to repeat his confession to a priest, and to do penance for him."\*

*pro invicem, ut salvemur.* Confessio itaque quæ Deo fit purgat peccata, ea vero quæ sacerdoti fit, docet qualiter ipsa purgentur peccata. Deus namque salutis et sanitatis autor et largitor, plerumque hanc præbes suæ potentiae invisibili administratione, plerumque medicorum operatione.—(Synodus Cabilionensis ii, an. 813.)

\* Carpent., Supplém. à Ducange, au mot *Confession.*

Confession between laymen was still acknowledged valid in the thirteenth century, as is proved by the facts related by Joinville in these terms : “Sir Guy d’Ybelin, the constable of Cyprus, knelt by my side, and confessed to me ; and I said to him, ‘I absolve you as far as God has given me to do so.’”\* This doctrine was approved by the Church, at least till the end of the thirteenth century, as we find from the statutes of the synod of the church of Casal, in the year 1270, wherein it is said, in chapter the 5th, “When the danger of death is imminent, and one cannot have recourse to one’s own priest, nor even to others, one may confess one’s sins to a layman.”†

Lastly, the custom of confession between laymen was perpetuated, and existed in some churches even as late as the beginning of the seventeenth century, in spite of the prescriptions of the councils, and the order of popes and bishops. In vain was it prohibited by Paul IV. in 1555, and by Gregory XIII. in 1574 ; since Clement VIII. was obliged to reiterate the same prohibition in a bull published at the end of the sixteenth century,

\* “Messire Gui d’Ybelin, conestable de Chypre, s’agenouilla en coste de moy, et se confessa à moy, et je l’y dis : je vous asolz de tel poin comme Dieu m’a donné.”

† Cum eminent mortis periculum, nec potest habere proprium sacerdotem, in quo casu, si alii defuerint, potest etiam laico confiteri.

or at the beginning of the seventeenth. In this bull he thus invokes the arm of the Inquisition, and that of the temporal power: "We decree by this institution, to be for ever valid, that who-soever shall be found to have celebrated mass or administered the sacrament of confession without having been promoted to the sacred order of the priesthood, be immediately given up by the judges of the Holy Inquisition, or by the ordinary of the place, to the civil power, in order that the secular judges may inflict upon him the punishment he deserves."\* Thus was sacerdotal and sacramental confession engrafted among the other superstitions of Catholicism, by the help of the spiritual menaces of the church, supported by temporal power.

\* *Hac perpetuo valitura constitutione decernimus, ut qui-cumque non promotus ad sacrum presbiteratus ordinem, repertus fuerit missarum celebrationem, vel sacramentalem confessionem audivisse, a judiciis sanctæ inquisitionis, vel locorum ordinariis . . . et statim curiæ seculari tradetur, per judices sœculares debit is pœnis plectandus.*

---

## CHAPTER VI.

CHANGE OF ANCIENT DISCIPLINE AND PENANCE,  
IN CONSEQUENCE OF THE CORRUPTION OF  
CHRISTIANITY.

---

PENITENCE has assumed in the Christian religion forms of severity or laxity, according to the zeal or lukewarmness, the virtue or the depravity of the men who professed this religion;—according as they did so, through conviction or from habit. The policy and interests of the clergy likewise contributed to the same variations. Severity was carried to extremes in the very beginning. Public penance, however, before they swelled the number of moral sins in the compilation of the so-called apostolical canons, was confined to a very small number of sins. Saint Placien, in his *Exhortation to Penitence*, informs us that, in his time, none

were subjected to penance but persons guilty of the sins mentioned by the apostles in the council of Jerusalem, such as idolatry, murder, and adultery. As to other sins, they were remedied by a compensation in good works.\* They thought that he who, after having committed serious transgressions, repented sincerely and asked pardon of God, was justified by the reception of baptism, and that he could no longer commit faults being thus sanctified, but that he was unpardonable if he repeated the offence. "It will, perhaps, be said," observes Origen, "that the condition of the ancients seems to be more advantageous than ours, for this reason, that, when they had committed sins, they obtained forgiveness of them by offering up sacrifices of several sorts, whereas among us the forgiveness of sins is granted but once and in the beginning, when one receives the grace of baptism. Afterwards there is no longer any mercy to be expected by sinners, and never after do they obtain grace."

The antiquity of this doctrine is attested by Saint Cyprian, who says: "There is no longer any hope of pardon when one has renounced God after having known him."† He grounds this

\* Reliqua autem peccata, meliorum operum compensacione curantur.

† Cyprian., de Disciplina et habitu virginum.

opinion upon this passage of Saint Paul: “There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth.”\* But everything in religious maxims and practices is subject to change, even as it happens in the ordinary institutions of life.

As a short time after the adoption of this desperate doctrine, several persons had embraced Christianity without reflection, now through a spirit of superstition, now for the advantage of some temporal interests, or through enthusiasm, &c., it must consequently have happened that a certain number, finding themselves thwarted in their inclinations, or fearful of danger, apostatized in times of persecution. The Church then thought it was its interest to be less severe, and to receive back the sheep that had strayed away from the flock. The delinquents were therefore admitted to penitence, but only for once, every relapse having been declared irremissible. This is what happened in the time of Hermas, who says that “the servants of God are admitted to penitence only once.” He adds afterwards: “Know then, that if any one, after having received the pledge

\* Voluntarie enim peccantibus nobis post acceptam notitiam veritatis, jam non relinquitur pro peccatis hostia.—(Paulus ad Hebreos, cap. x., v. 26.)

of this holy and august vocation (baptism), should happen to be tempted by the demon, and should yield, God grants him only one penitence; so that if, after this first backsliding, he fall, and desire to rise again, penitence will be of no avail for him.”\* This is what is attested by Saint Augustin in his 144th letter to Macedonius, and confirmed by Saint Ambrosius in the following passage: “they are rightly blamed who believe they may do penance several times, for this is abusing Jesus Christ. If any one had done a sincere penance, he would not suppose that it was lawful to renew it; for, even as there is but one baptism, so also there is but one penance which is done in public.” Saint Ambrosius says expressly in his second book, *De Paenitentia*, “that penance ought not to be repeated any more than baptism.” Every reconciliation with God, even in the hour of death, was refused to those who had been guilty of certain sins, such as apostasy, adultery, &c.

This discipline was maintained till the time of Saint Cyprian, that is to say, till the middle of the third century. The delinquent was abandoned to the mercy of God like a scabby sheep. The communion was likewise refused to those who, during

\* Hermas, le Pasteur, lib. ii., Procept., §§ 4 et 5.

their lives, had not changed their conduct or performed the duties of Christians, but who, at the point of death, prayed for reconciliation : which is seen in the following text of Saint Cyprian: "We think those ought to be excluded from the communion and from peace who, not doing penance and giving no sincere proofs of their repentance during life, begin to entreat, when being ill they find themselves in danger of perishing ; for their request does not proceed from the desire of doing penance, but from the imminent danger of death : he is not worthy of being consoled in the hour of death, who never entertained the thought that he must die."\* The doctrine of Saint Ambrosius is not less severe when he addresses a virgin of the Lord who had had a child : "Live in penance till your last day ; and believe not that men can absolve you, having been deceived by your own consent ; for, having sinned directly against God, it is from Him alone that

\* Pœnitentiam non agentes, nec dolorem delictorum suorum, toto corde et manifesta lamentationis suæ professione testantes, prohibendos omnino censuimus a spe communicationis et pacis, si in infirmitate et periculo cœperint deprecari, quia rogare illos non delicti pœnitentia, sed mortis urgentis admonitio compellit ; nec dignus est in morte recipere solatum, qui se non cogitavit esse moriturum.—(Cyprian., Epistol.)

you can expect a remedy at the day of judgment.”\*

The council of Elvira prescribes the refusal of penance and reconciliation in a great number of cases, even in the hour of death. By the sixth canon, it forbids to admit those who cause death by witchcraft, a crime, so it says, which can be committed only by idolaters. “*Quod sine idolatria scelus perficere non potuit.*” Which proves how very ignorant and superstitious are the bishops and the clergy. The twelfth canon subjects to the same condition both fathers and mothers, and any one of the faithful who, for money, should abandon their daughters to infamy. Bishops, priests, and deacons, undergo the same severity according to the eighteenth canon, if, in the performance of their ministry, they be surprised in fornication: *si in ministerio positi detecti fuerint, quod sint mæchatii.* The same law is applied by the sixty-fourth canon to adulterous women; by the sixty-fifth, to married priests, if they do not divorce when they know that their wives have committed adultery (a proof that priests used to marry, and thus divorce was established); by the seventy-third canon, to informers whose denunciation may have caused the proscription or death of an individual, &c.†

\* S. Ambrosius, lib. ad Virgin., cap. 8, *in fine.*

† Concil. Eliberiton. The Council of Elvira, in the king-

This severity of the primitive Church, established by all the documents of history, was not of long duration, as is proved by several decrees of the councils. Penance, which had been refused to apostates, was granted to them after their recovery from any sickness during which they had entreated to be received to reconciliation. This is what is commanded by the first council of Arles: "As to those who apostatize," says the twenty-third canon, "and never show themselves at church, nor seek to do penance, but, being attacked by sickness ask for the communion, we order that it shall be given to such only after their recovery, and if they bear fruits worthy of penitence."\*

Tertullian, with his severity of an African, says, in his treatise on penitence, that faults committed against God cannot be pardoned by the Church. Saint Cyprian is often as severe, though he shows a certain indulgence in some cases, as it happened on the occasion of an event which he

dom of Grenada, in Spain, was held in the year 313. Lenglet du Fresney Tab. Chron.—Transl.

\* De his qui apostolant, et nunquam se ad ecclesiam representant, nec quidem poenitentiam agere querunt, et postea in infirmitate arrepti, petunt communionem placuit eis non dandum communionem, nisi revaluerint et agerint dignos fructus poenitentiae.—(Concil. i, arelatens., c. 23.)

himself relates. Some virgins consecrated to God were surprised with men. Bishop Pomponius, desiring to subject them to public penance, they pretended, while owning their crimes, that they had, however, never had any intercourse with them, and they asked to be allowed to prove it. Pomponius consulted Saint Cyprian on this subject. The latter, after having deliberated upon this case, in a meeting composed of four bishops and a great number of priests, answered that it was necessary that these virgins should be examined, "and, in case they were found to be chaste, they were to be admitted to the communion of the Church, threatening them, however, with the severest censures, and the difficulty they would experience to re-enter the communion of the Church, if they dwelt with the same men, in the same house, and under the same roof. . . . But that if they were found guilty of any breach of chastity, they would, by such conduct, render themselves guilty of adultery towards God, far more criminal than adultery committed in ordinary marriage, and they could be restored to the Church only after a penance of a certain duration."\* Saint Cyprian allows us to remain in ignorance as to

\* Et si virgines inventæ fuerint, accepta communicatione ad Ecclesia admitti, hæc tamen interminatione, ut si ad eosdem masculos revertæ fuerint, ait si cum iisdem in unâ

whether all these virgins were found to be intact and immaculate: the nature of human things must make us suppose the contrary, and with the more likelihood, as Saint Cyprian says, "that the men, among whom was a deacon, were subjected to penance as guilty of adultery towards Jesus Christ." He commends Pomponius "for having acted with vigour by subjecting that deacon to penance who had lived habitually with a virgin, and the other men who had behaved in like manner."\*

The diversity of opinions which we have just noticed in Saint Cyprian was likewise manifested upon the same subject among the bishops of those early ages, especially with respect to those who were termed *lapsi*—renegades or apostates. Some refused penance absolutely throughout life, others granted it in the hour of death, others again immediately, on the demand of these apostates, especially when they produced before the bishops tickets signed by martyrs or confessors, that is, by those who had been incarcerated or tormen-

domo et sub eodem tecto simul habitaverint, graviore censura ejiciantur, nec in Ecclesiam post modum facile recipiantur...Si antem de eis aliqua corruptela fuerit deprehensa, agat paenitentiam plenam, quia hoc crimen admisit, non maritis sed Christi adultera est, et ideo estimatio justo tempore postea exomolesi facta ad Ecclesiam redeat.  
(S. Cyprian., Epist. 62.)

\* *Ibid.*

ted for the sake of religion. These tickets were conceived in these terms: *let the bearer receive the sacrament with his friends*: they who produced them were called *libellati*. The number of them became so considerable, according to St. Cyprian's account, that as many as a thousand presented themselves daily. Indeed, it is well known that several Christians apostatized during the persecution of Decius. A considerable number of the popular class had embraced the Christian religion at that period, through instigation, ignorance, superstition, the contagion of example, and without due consideration; it is, therefore, not surprising that they should leave that religion at a time when those who professed it were threatened with danger. The adopting or abandoning of a religion, according to the vicissitude of circumstances or interests, even when there is no danger to be apprehended against life, is a fact of which history furnishes us with a great number of examples, without even our having any need to recur to what happened in France, during the different periods of our late revolutions.

The primitive Christians, at the period of their enthusiasm and fervour for the new religion, far from remaining satisfied with appearances and the observance of a few outward practices, as was afterwards the case, and as it has continued down to our own time, rejected without mercy such of

their brethren as violated in a notorious manner the precepts attached to their faith. They preferred to admit into their society only a small number of faithful, strict observers of their laws, to recognizing as Christians masses of men who were only so in name and outward appearance. This is what was still practised in the time of Saint Chrysostom. "If I perceive," says he, "that you persevere in the same irregularities, I will forbid you entrance to the sanctuary and a participation in the mysteries, as persons guilty of fornication, adultery, and murders; for it is better to address our prayers to God with two or three faithful who observe the precepts of the divine law, than to unite with perverse men who corrupt the others."\* But religion having been corrupted, every individual was admitted who, through birth, circumstances, education, habits, interests, and for the most part through constraint, happened to be under the banner of the cross, whatever might otherwise be their conduct and opinions. Canonि-

\* Si videro vos in iisdem inerrantes, interdicam omnino vobis sacri istius ingressum vestibuli, et cœlestis participationem mysterii, sicut fornicatoribus et adulteris et his qui de homicidiis arguuntur. Melius namque est cum duobus vel tribus Divinæ legis præcepta servantibus, orationes Deo offerre solitas, quam inique agentium cœterosque corrumpentium, multitudinem congregare. (Chrysost., Homil. 17, in Matth.)

cal punishments were very severe, as we see from the passage in Tertullian, quoted in a former chapter. Origen presents us with a very sad picture of the state to which penitents were reduced: "Since I sinned," says he, "I have never laughed, never rejoiced, nor allowed myself anything that might be agreeable to me; but I have ever been in affliction, ever in penance, ever in tears."\* Saint Epiphanius speaks of the excessive fasts to which sinners were subjected: "Some of them," says he, "prolong their fast for two, three, or four days, others the whole week till the Sunday following, even till they hear the cock crow, and without taking any food all that time."†

Pope Stephen, who lived in 250, enjoins an individual who had killed his wife, "to abstain entirely from wine, beer, and meat, except on Easter-day and the anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ; to do penance, using only bread, water, and salt; to pass all his time fasting, watching, praying, and giving alms; never to marry; never to go to the baths, nor to any

\* Ex quo peccavi, nunquam lætatus sum, nunquam mihi aliquid jucunditatis indulsi; sed semper in mœrore fui, semper in poenitentia, semper in luctu. (Orig., Homil. 1.)

† Non nulli ad biduum, vel triduum, vel quatriduum usque, jejunia prorogant alii totam hebdomadam ad usque sequentis dominicæ gallicinium, sine cibo transmittunt. (Epiphan., Exposit. fid., n. 22.)

meeting; to remain at the church-door; and the sacrament of the body of Jesus Christ to be forbidden him all the days of his life.”\*

Saint Augustin makes us acquainted with the motive why penance had been made so austere when he says: “If man returned speedily to bliss from his former state, he would consider the mortal fall of sin as mere sport.”† This is, indeed, what has happened since the establishment of auricular confession. How many Catholics are there whose life is but one continued tissue woven alternately with sin and penance, penance and sin!

The severity of penance was introduced principally for the purpose of stopping the progress of the different sects that arose from the very commencement of Christianity, and especially to oppose the Novatians and Montamists. It is worthy of notice that priests, and even deacons, were at every period exempted from canonical penalties, whatever were the crimes they had been guilty of. They were simply dismissed from the duties which they could no longer discharge without scandal, or bringing public indignation upon the whole body of which they formed a part. Yet, in good morality, as in good logic, criminals ought to be punished so much more severely as the func-

\* This passage is quoted by Saint Thomas Aquinas.

† August, Sermo 34.

tions with which they are invested, placing them above simple individuals, require from them more probity and virtue, and impose upon them stricter obligations, and, consequently, a greater responsibility. But the Church, like the governments, made unto themselves a morality upon this subject conformable to their policy, but discordant with the Gospel.

And here arises another question worthy of remark, namely, whether canonical penalties, so severe in the primitive church, and whether penances imposed in sacerdotal confession, and which are so benignant, have contributed to the purity of morals and a more rigorous practice of every virtue? This is what we are permitted to doubt, when we compare the moral state of the Christians during the first two centuries with that of succeeding ages down to our own time. Fastings, macerations, long prayers, and perpetual contemplations of the mind, customary especially in the East, have seldom inspired those who practised them with a more regular or more charitable conduct. Indeed, all such corporeal, deprecatory, mystical penances, do not constitute acts of virtue in themselves, have no merit, neither are they useful to anybody, and consequently they have no effect upon practice: thus, "these promises and penances are null," as Tertullian expresses it.\*

\* *Emendatio nulla, pœnitentio necessario vana.*—(Tertull., *de Pœnitentia*, cap. i.)

What are the effects produced by the old and the new form of penance, ordered as obligatory? People submit to them, not through any sentiment or logical conclusion, but through a mechanical habitual motion; they pronounce formulas of contrition, without being sincerely affected with repentance; the mouth pronounces without any conviction of the heart, and the mind is absent from these outward demonstrations. They submit likewise to the pains or temporary privations that are imposed; they thus flatter themselves that they have performed their duties: conscience is tranquil. But all these forms are speedily forgotten, as is proved by experience, since there is no improvement, and they continue the same kind of life.

It was not thus that Saint Chrysostom understood penitence, with the salutary fruits it ought to produce. "Produce," says he, "fruits worthy of repentance. But how are we to produce them? By following a different kind of life to what we have led till now; for instance, have you committed any theft, give henceforth what belongs to you; have you lived habitually in a state of fornication, abstain even from a lawful wife for certain appointed days in the year, and be chaste; have you wronged or struck your neighbour, bless those who curse you, and do well to those who injure you."\*

\* Facite fructus dignor pœnitentiæ. Quomodo antem  
G 2

The clergy, seeing the state of decay into which the ancient penitentiary discipline had fallen, thought they had the right to have recourse to the temporal power to recall it. . . . “The custom of submitting to penance prescribed by the ancient canons is fallen into disuse,” says the council of Châlons, and then it adds: “We must demand succour of our lord the emperor, in order that whoever sins publicly may be punished by a public penance, and excommunicated conformably to the canons.”\* The imperial power came accordingly to succour sacerdotal impotency, as may be seen by the edict of Louis le Débonnaire, which enacts, “That whoever has sinned publicly shall do a public penance, according to the prescriptions of the canons, and whoever has been guilty of secret sins shall do penance according to the counsel of the priests.”†

faciemus? Si utique prioribus contraria facimus; verbi gratia, rapuisti; dona et tua in posterum; longo es tempore fornicatus: legitima etiam uxore ad aliquot definitas dies abstine; castitatem exercere; proximos injuria affecisti et pulsasti; de cætero benedicite maledicentibus et percutientibus benefacito. (Chrysostom., Hom. in Matth.)

\* Pœnitentiam agere juxta antiquam canonum constitutionem in plerisque locis ab usu recessit...ut a Domino imperatore adjutorium, qualiter si quis publice peccat, publica mulctetur pœnitentia, et secundum ordinem canonum pro merito suo excommunicetur. (Concil, Cabillonens, ii., c. 25.)

† Si publice actum fuerit publicam inde agat pœnitentiam

Discipline, relating to penance, successively weakened or mitigated from age to age, became easy and little burdensome to sinners, in proportion as public confession fell into disuse, and the custom of consulting priests about the kind of penance to be done, to reconcile people with God, became more common. Thus penance was reduced, in the commencement of the sixth century, to the forms and conditions in which, with a few variations, it is found to be at the present day, excepting, however, auricular sacerdotal confession, which was not declared sacramental and obligatory till about seven centuries later. All sinners were admitted to participate in the sacraments, when they testified a desire to do so, whatever might be the crimes of which they had been guilty. “The viaticum (sacrament) must not be refused,” says the Council of Agde, “to any who are in danger of dying.”\* The fourth Council of Carthage carries condescension still farther, when it orders to shrive the sick, even

juxta sanctorum canonum sanctionem; si vero occulto, sacerdotum concilio ex hoc agat poenitentiam.—(Concil. Gallic., t. ii., p. 462, anno 826.)

\* Viaticum omnibus in morte positis non est denegandum. (Concil. Agathen., can. 15.) The first Council of Agde (Agatha), in Languedoc, department of the Hérault, was in 506, concerning discipline. There was also a council at Agde in 1535, but the former is the one of which M. de Lasteyrie speaks.—Transl.

though they have lost their senses, providing they had previously sent for a priest. “Let penance be granted to any one who, being sick, demands it. But if, having sent for the priest, his illness become worse, if he loose his speech, or the use of his senses, he shall be reconciled upon the testimony of those who may have heard him, by the imposition of hands, and by slipping the holy wafer into his mouth.”\*

Generally, it was only for heavy crimes, notoriously known to the public, and which had caused general offence, that public penance was required. This usage, abolished in 390, on account of a deacon having publicly accused himself of having had an illicit commerce with a woman, as we have already said, was, however, practised, though very seldom, till the time of Charlemagne, as is demonstrated by the following capitulary of this Emperor: “If the fault has been public, so ought also the penance to be, according to the holy canons; but, if it be secret, people must do penance regulated according to the counsel of the priests.”†

\* Qui pœnitentiam in infirmitate petit, si casu dum ad eum sacerdos invitatus venit, oppressus infirmitate obmutuerit, vel in phrenesim versus fuerit, dixerint testimonium qui eum audierunt, et accipiat pœnitentiam, et si continuus creditur moriturus, reconcilietur per manus impositionem, et ori ejus infundatur eucharistia. (Concil. Carthag., iv., can. 76.)

† Nam si publice actum fuerit, publicam ideo agat pœni-

We see that, although there was no auricular confession, the priests were consulted at that period as to the kind of penance which suited the sort of crime of which any one was guilty ; a custom which facilitated the establishment of sacerdotal confession.

There is reason to be astonished when we compare the practices and duties imposed upon the primitive Christians, as a condition of salvation, with the penitential system which has been established among Christians for many centuries. "Let all the penitents who wish to receive penance present themselves before the bishop, at the church-door" (says one of the fathers of the Church); "let them be clad in sack-cloth and barefoot, with their faces prostrate in the dust, showing by their dress and countenances that they acknowledge themselves guilty."\* "He who does penance ought," according to Saint Ambrosius, "to be ready to support opprobrium and insult, and to remain unmoved if any one reproach him with his crime ; so the penitent ought to submit

tentiam, *juxta sanctorum canonum sanctionem* ; si vero occulta, *sacerdotum concilio ex hoc agat pœnitentiam*. (Capit. Carol.-Mag., lib. vi., ch. 96.)

\* *Omnis pœnitentur qui publicam suscipiunt pœnitentiam, ante fores ecclesiæ se representent, episcopo civitatis, sacco induiti, nudis pedibus, vultus in terra prostrati, reos sese ipsos habitu et vultu proclamatos.*

to the penalty inflicted upon him by God here below, in order to escape eternal punishment."\*

In public penance, people were subjected to five severe ordeals before they were absolved and admitted to the communion: 1st, the penitent was to shed tears, standing at the entrance of the place where the Christians assembled to pray, *deflere stantem ante fores oratorii*, and to entreat them, as they entered, to pray for him: 2ndly, he was received among those who listened to the lectures; 3rdly, he was confined among the other penitents; 4thly, he prayed later with all the faithful, but he was not admitted to the oblation; 5thly, at length he received the imposition of hands, and was admitted to the communion, provided he had not committed such crimes as were never to be pardoned. This penance often lasted several consecutive years.

The Church of Rome never abandons her maxims, doctrines, or dogmas, even though they be universally disowned or rejected: constant in her pretensions to infallibility, she produces them directly or indirectly in her writings and official acts, hoping that circumstances may occur to en-

\* Qui pœnitentiam agit, paratus esse debet opprobria, injuriasque ferendas, nec commoveri si quis ei peccati sui crimen objiciat. Ergo qui pœnitentiam agit offerre se debet ad pœnam, ut hic puniatur a Domino, non ad supplicia æterna servetur.—(Ambr., in Psal. xxxvii., *in initio*.)

able her to realize them some day or other. This has been the fate of public confession, which, after having been laid aside for seven or eight centuries, reappeared in 1281, under the auspices of the Council of Lambeth, in England, as we find from its ninth session, which enacts that, according to the circumstances and the gravity of the offence, a solemn and public penance shall be imposed. It was according to the same principles that the Council of Trent, under the direction of the court of Rome, produced the following decree:—"The apostolic man admonishes that public sinners ought to be reprehended publicly. It is beyond doubt that he who has committed publicly, and in the presence of many, a crime producing scandal, deserves to be subjected publicly to a penance in proportion to his fault, in order that, by an authentic act of his amendment, he may recal to the path of virtue those whom he had corrupted by his example."\* It is worthy of remark that this council, by a canon of its thirtieth session, gives to bishops the faculty of exempting from the

\* *Apostolicus monet publice peccantes palam esse corripiendos. Quante igitur ab aliquo publice et in multorum conspectu, commissum fuerit crimen unde alias scandalo offensus commotosque fuisse, non sit dubitandum, huic condignam pro modo culpœ, pœnitentiam publice injungi opertore, ut quos exemplo suo ad malos mores provocavit, suæ emendationis testimonio ad rectam revocet vitam.*—(Concil. Trid., sec. iv., can. 8.)

law, in cases of scandalous sins, whenever they think proper; whereas, in the primitive Church, there was no exception for any Christian: the rich and powerful were subject to the general law.

The councils which succeeded each other introduced modifications into the ancient forms of penance, according to the opinions current at the periods when they were held. Thus, the third Council of Toledo enjoins to priests and bishops, that whosoever, sick or well, presents himself for penance must have his head shaved, and be covered with sack-cloth and ashes, *prius eum tonsdeat, et in cinere et cilicio habitum mutare faciat.* As for women, they must be veiled and change their dresses.\* The councils took the liberty of imposing upon penitents obligations contrary to the duties of society and even to those of nature. Thus the second council, held at Aurillac, prohibits them from military service, upon pain of excommunication till death. As for women who have lost their husbands, it forbids them the entrance to the church, and the same prohibition is extended to men whose wives are dead.† The third council of the same town prohibits them from occupying any public office. Sacerdotal authority likewise usurped the rights of the civil power, by

\* Concil. Toletan., iii., can. 12.

† Concil. Aurel., ii., can. 14.

imposing silence on the laws and by protecting criminals from public vengeance when they took refuge in churches, under pretence of subjecting them to penance.\* Councils have also “forbidden married men and women to live as such during Lent, to accept invitations to dinner, to ride in coaches or on horseback, or to exercise any business or trade productive of gain.”†

Prescriptions and prohibitions, as well as the practices established by the councils, popes, or bishops, during the periods of scholastic ignorance in the middle ages, had loaded consciences with a multitude of sins unknown to the primitive Christians; thence resulted a new penitential system, and a mass of cases of conscience which enriched theology, without injuring the interests of the clergy. It is, therefore, with reason that a learned writer, Deille, observes that, in the time of Origen, Tertullian, and Saint Cyprian, scarcely a thousandth part of the sins which, in modern times, have become the province of auricular confession, belonged to the sins of which people accused themselves under the law of public penance. Saint Pacian, in his *Exhortation to Penance*, lays down no other

\* Si ad ecclesiam convolaverint, mortis quidem legibus eruantur, poenitentiae vero quam antistes consideraverit, absque dubio submittantur.

† Vid. Capitul. Caroli-Magni, *passim*.

sins subject to penance than those designated by the apostles in the council of Jerusalem—namely, idolatry, homicide, and adultery. “As for the other sins, they are remedied by a compensation of good works.”\* Saint Gregory of Nice sets forth the same doctrine in his canonical letter to Litoius, and it is likewise that of Saint Chrysostom, in his orison for Saint Philogonus. All these new sins were at first collected in writings, known under the name of Penitential Books. These works, composed according to the opinions of the different epochs when they appeared, by ignorant and superstitious men, brought so much disturbance into the discipline of the Church, that it was thought necessary, in more enlightened periods, to proscribe them and condemn them to the flames. In fact, this is what was done by the sixth council of Paris, as we may see from the tenor of its thirty-second canon, expressed in these terms:—“Whereas, a great number of priests, some through negligence, others from ignorance, impose upon those who confess their sins to them a mode of penance contrary to the prescriptions of the canons, acting conformably to certain codicils known by the name of Penitentials, works contrary to the authority of the canons—we have unanimously thought that it

\* Reliqua autem peccata, meliorum operum compensatione, curantur.

would be beneficial that every bishop should, in his diocese, carefully seek out all such erroneous writings, and, when found, commit them to the flames, in order that, henceforth, they may not serve ignorant priests to deceive men ... For it is through this ignorance and their negligence that the crimes of a great number of persons have remained unpunished ; and it is not doubtful that the consequence has been the destruction of souls."\* It is proper to remark that the opinion of this council proves the absurdity of auricular confession. For, indeed, can an institution be considered as divine or good in itself which may be vitiated through the error, ignorance, or incredulity of a man, so far as to become null, and, consequently, to occasion the perdition of souls, as the council expresses it. This remark is the more just, as these books, which long served as a rule, even before the invention of auricular confession, had been composed by monks and

\* Quoniam multi sacerdotum partim incuria, partim ignorantia, modum poenitentiae, rectum suum confidentibus, secus quam jura canonica decernant, imponunt, utentes scilicet quibusdam codicillis contra canonicam auctoritatem scriptis, quos poenitentiales vocant...omnibus nobis salubriter in commune visum est ut unusquisque episcoporum, in sua parochia eosdem erroneos codicillos diligenter perquirat, et inventos igni tradat; ne per eos ulterius sacerdotes imperiti homines decipient...Quoniam hactenus eorum incuria et ignorantia multorum flagitia remanserunt impunita; et hoc ad animarum ruinam pertinere dubium non est.—(Concil. Parisien., can. 32.)

ignorant superstitious forgers, in the ninth century, as is averred in the following passage of the council of Châlons, held in 813 :—“In the manner of imposing penance upon those who make an avowal of their sins, one ought to conform either to the constitutions of the ancient canons, to the authority of the Holy Scriptures, or to the customs of the church, repudiating, and absolutely rejecting, the books termed Penitential, the errors of which are certain, and the authors uncertain.”\*

Silliness and ignorance are not the only vices which appear in books of this description. The final object which characterises them is that of lucre; as will be shown in one of the chapters of this book. They denote, moreover, the barbarity with which the bishops used to treat the penitents. Indeed, here is what was inculcated according to one of these books, designated by the name of Penitential of Iron, *penitentiale ferreum*: “The clerk, often bound inwardly by his crime, is outwardly surrounded by an iron chain by the bishop, his penitentiary, and his whole body is closely bound with this chain.”† The duty of penitentiary, at-

\* Modus pœnitentiae peccata sua confitentibus aut per antiquorum canonum institutionem aut per sanctorum Scripturarum auctoritatem, aut per ecclesiasticam consuetudinem imponi debet, repudiatis ac penitus eliminatis libellis quos pœnitentiales vocant, quorum sunt certi errores, incerti auctores.—(Synod. Cabilionen., ii.)

† Hoc crimine sœpe dictus clericus ligatus interius, a suo

tributed to bishops, was generally performed by priests. It was instituted according to Socrates and Soromenus, about the year 251, in consequence of the scandal occasioned by public confession, as well as on account of the repugnance which several persons felt to unveil their crimes before the assembly of the faithful. These penitentiaries determined the penance to which sinners were to be subjected, and gave them a remission of their sins, by the imposition of hands, according to the consent of the faithful. Rome, that has successively encroached upon the rights of the faithful, upon those of the priests, the bishops, and even of the councils, ultimately attributed to the popes alone the functions of penitentiaries, now performed in the only capital of the Christian world by the pope's delegates, who are termed *Grand Penitentiaries*. They are to be seen in the Church of Saint Peter, armed with a wand some yards long, absolving, from their confessional, the devotees who present themselves before them.

The more modern of the penitential books indicate how this confession was made. "The priest orders a man," say they, "to sit near him and to discourse with him of the sins inscribed in the penitential volume. According as he thinks fit,

pontifice pœnitentiali, ferro vincitur exterius, ac toto truncu corporis arctatur strictis circulis.—(Acta Tulens. Episcop. apud Mamert., t. iii.; Anecd., anno 1025.)

to some he commands to abstain from food, to others to give alms, to remain on their knees with their arms crossed, or other things of the same kind which relate to the salvation of the soul.”\* These penitentiaries gave tickets of penance. This was a testimonial which proved to the faithful of the place to which any one branded with any crime was about to repair, that he had been reconciled with the Church, as we may see from the following quotation: “Though Theodore has been received conformably to his ticket of penance, which proves that he has been absolved at Rome, where they gave him this proof of his pardon.”† This fact, well known to certain Molinist doctors, doubtless gave rise to the idea of exacting tickets of confession from the non-conformists in the last century, but with this difference, that the former were perfectly at liberty to take, or not to take, the tickets of penance, *libelli pœnitentiaæ*, whereas, in the latter case, the spiritual and temporal

\* Jubet autem sacerdos sedere contra se et colloqui cum eo de supra dictis vitiis . . . imperat quæ judicet, id est aliquos a cibis abstinendo, alios eleæmosinas dando, non nullos sæpius flectendo genua, sive in cruce stando, aut aliquid alijs ejusmodi quod ad animæ salutem pertinet.

† Quamvis ipse Theodorus, postscriptum romanum libellum, indulta culpa, quam contra patriarchum Ignatium . . . commiserat, per libellum pœnitentiaæ receptus sit, etc.—(Anastasi ad Actus viii., Synod., act. 2.)

powers united to impose orthodoxy upon the refractory.

We will add to what we have said about penance the following passage, borrowed from Fleury; it will prove once more that, upon this point as upon many others, the Christians made for themselves a religious system which differs totally from the opinions and belief of the primitive Church, inasmuch as Christianity had gradually become corrupted, even in the time of Saint Athanasius, which that Father of the Church expresses in these words: *Fides temporum et non evangeliorum.* "But will you say," observes the French theologian, "you keep people in penance, for a single sin, some fifteen or twenty years, and sometimes all their life? Keeping them whole years outside the church door, exposed to the contempt of everybody; then several years more inside the church, but prostrate; obliging them to wear sack-cloth with ashes on their heads; causing them to let their beard and hair grow long, to fast on bread and water, to remain pent up and renounce the commerce of life,—was not all this enough to drive sinners to despair and make religion odious? I should say so, were I to consult only ordinary ideas, but I am withheld first by the facts which I have related to you; and I have not invented them.... We did not make our religion; we received it from our fathers such

as they had received it from theirs, even till we re-ascend to the time of the apostles. Therefore we must bend our reason, to submit ourselves to the authority of the early ages, not only for the dogmas but also for the practices.”\*

Far from inclining reason to the dogmas and precepts of the ancient Church, they have been perverted, and new ones have been created, in order to obtain dominion over the human mind, by imposing upon it a heavier yoke, always capable of being made lighter according to the persons and circumstances. Accordingly, acts of charity were superseded by practices as contrary to the designs of God as to nature and the happiness of man. Inconsiderate priests and fanatical ignorant monks persuaded the faithful that there could be no salvation without abstaining habitually from all the gifts which the beneficent hand of God had put at their disposal, and that being all criminals, they could find favour with God only by mortifying and tormenting their bodies with vigils, fasts, and acts of cruelty upon themselves. Flagellation reserved for slaves and criminals was presented as the penance the most proper for subduing the flesh and making oneself agreeable to God. This act, a mixture of barbarism and fanaticism, of which Paganism had set the example, was adopted

\* Fleury, Disc. sur l' Hist. Ecclés., 2<sup>me</sup> disc., art 8.

by ignorant or superstitious Christians, as an efficacious means of penitence and salvation. It is conformably to this opinion, so outrageous towards the Deity, that the Brahmins have made themselves the executioners of their own bodies.

Whatever opposes, in a religious point of view, the rational inclinations of human nature, and requires a certain self-abnegation, excites astonishment and appears meritorious to prejudice, ignorance, and superstition. Thus it is we see men who, through a fatal error, a false idea of perfection, and of duties to be performed to the Deity, make an abnegation of their reason and their persons, to give themselves up to insensate practices, not less hurtful to themselves than useless to society. This fatal system gave rise to the foundation of monachal corporations. There, rod in hand, they established a penitentiary system for even those who had not sinned. This practice formerly prevailed in almost all the convents and monasteries of either sex, and it will be probably revived in our time; for the court of Rome, that grand organizer of monachism, ever returns to its ancient prescriptions. Flagellation was considered as the most efficacious means of obtaining mercy from God and of assuring one's salvation.

Mutual confession, in use in the primitive Church, was preserved among the earlier monkish

associations in perfect integrity, whereas penance assumes in those sombre retreats a character of fanaticism and barbarity. The monks, separated their very origin from the society of mankind, and unable, in that situation, to perform the duties of charity,—duties identical with those of penance, and the complement of every perfection, fancied they might replace them by sufferings, corporal torture, and even by the effusion of their blood, thus reckoning to make themselves agreeable to God, to expiate their crimes, and to acquire eternal salvation. Thus it was that superstition and fanaticism, after having instituted flagellation in the monasteries, transmitted it to the other Christians through the medium of the priests, who, after having established themselves as mediators between God and man, and judges of the chastisements to be inflicted upon them, imposed and inflicted, even with their own hands, flagellation upon their penitents : thus making them feel their pre-eminence and power, even as a master does, when, armed with a scourge, he commands his slaves.

It was from this spirit of domination that they had caused the following maxim to prevail among the brutalized population of the middle ages : “there exist two things which preserve man from sin in an admirable manner ; namely, frequent confession and the scourge employed still more fre-

quently.”\* This is also what was enjoined by the councils, even on pain of punishment, particularly by that of Soissons, held towards the middle of the ninth century, where we see bishops, armed with rods, whipping husbandmen, serfs, and slaves, or even performing this charitable function upon their own priests.† We find that this usage was general in the beginning of the thirteenth century, according to a chronicle of that period, which says: “Let Robert and Hervé do public penance; and, being naked and barefoot, and holding rods in their hands during the procession which takes place in the church of Chartres, let them receive lashes from the hand of the bishop, according to the usage of the Church.”‡ It would be a

\* Duæ sunt quæ hominem mirabiliter a peccato conservant, scilicet: frequens confessio, et frequentior disciplina.—(Petrus Blesch. compen. in Job.)

† Missi nostri per singulas parochias denuntient qui si episcopus et ministri episcoporum pro criminibus colonos flagellaverit cum virgis propter metum aliorum et ut ipsi, criminosi corriganter, etc. Sicut in Synodo collocatum est, ut vel inviti poenitentiam corporaliter et temporaliter agant, ne ceteraliter percant.—(Capit. Carol. Calvi. et in con. Suess., ii., c. 9.)

‡ Robertus et Herveus publicam poenitentiam faciant nudi et discalceati; virgas in manibus portantes ad processionem in ecclesia Carnutensi et per manum episcopi Carnutensis, vel secundum consuetudinem ecclesiæ, accipient disciplinam.—(Carpent., nov. Glosser, v<sup>o</sup> Pœnitentes.)

curious sight to see our prelates, armed with rods, whipping, in a procession, the backs of certain sinners going to the confessional. We live in an age when one may still carry a wax-taper in a procession; but even devotees would renounce confession, if it was necessary to purchase absolution at such a price; accordingly, the clergy, who fashion themselves to everything, have abolished so onerous a servitude. However, they have not neglected to apply this salutary remedy, in secret, even upon the backs of our kings, whenever they found any blind enough or stupid enough to submit to it. Indeed, this is what happened to our devout Saint Louis, King of France. "That good king," says the chronicle, "led so good a life, that he confessed his sins every Friday to his priest, and, after his confession, stripped his shoulders, and caused himself to be flogged by the said priest with five little iron-chains, which he carried with him in a box."\* Guillaume de Nangis says that this prince had a confessor of the order of *prédictateurs*, who was accustomed to lash him so, that he suffered great pain, which he avowed only to the confessor who succeeded the former.

The emperors themselves submitted to the penitentiary castigation imposed by the priests. One

\* Chron. et vie de Saint Louis, c. ix.

author relates that Henry III., surnamed Le Noir, "had never dared to put on his imperial ornaments, without having asked permission of a priest and having confessed his sins, and received the castigation imposed upon him as penance."<sup>\*</sup>

In the same manner, Henri IV., King of France, allowed himself to be whipped on the shoulders by the hands of the sovereign Pontiff Clement VIII.: it is true he felt no physical pain, for it was done by proxy and upon the back of his ministers. "This king received several lashes of discipline upon the shoulders of M. d'Ossat and M. du Périon. Whilst the choristers were chanting the psalm *Miserere mei, Deus*, the pope, at every verse, struck again and again with the rod he had in his hand, the shoulders of the proxy, as well as those of the persons who accompanied him. *Verberabat et percutiebat humeros procuratorum, et cujuslibet ipsorum virga quam in manibus tenebat.*"<sup>†</sup> However, they obtained as a favour from the pope that there should be no mention made in the bull of absolution, of the penance he had been obliged to undergo.

It is always edifying to the faithful and glorious

\* Nunquam insignia regalia sibi præsumpsit imponere, nisi dum confessionis a pœnitentiae verborum, insuper satisfactione, licentiam a quolibet sacerdotum suppliciter mereatur.—(Vita S. Annone., c. 6, apud Suri 4 decem.)

† Lettre de M. d'Ossat à Villeroi, L. ii., lett. 73, an. 1596.

for the Church to see criminals making the *amende honorable*, publicly and voluntarily. This was the practice at Rome in the fourteenth century, when people were to be found devout and pious enough to brave public opinion, as a council informs us in the following passage: “In these days, public penance is not imposed for any crime, whatever be its enormity; but it may, however, be granted to such as ask for it, conformably to the ancient usage of the Church and to what is practised at Rome. For, even now, after having laid bare the shoulders of those who do their penance, they whip them outside the church, sometimes even till they draw blood, and this in the presence of a considerable crowd of spectators.”\*

\* Hodie pro crimine quantum libet enormi occulto, non imponitur poenitentia publica, nam volenti ad huc imponi potest, velut ecclesiæ præsertim romanæ consuetudo testis est. Nudantur enim etiam hoc tempore, Romæ quibusdam scapulæ, et extra templum coeduntur interdum usque ad sanguinem, idque numerosissima populi multitudine spectante.—(In Concil. Proven. Colon., cap de Confess.)

---

## CHAPTER VII.

NATURE AND EFFECTS OF AURICULAR AND SACERDOTAL CONFESSION AMONG ROMAN CATHOLICS.

---

“CONFESSION opens the gate of heaven,” said Saint Chrysostom. “He has been defiled by his crimes, but confession has opened for him the gates of paradise.”\* “Confession,” says another saint, “is the gate through which souls enter paradise.”† But the partisans of auricular confession may try in vain to make the most of these authorities, since they apply only to public confession, the only one in use at the time when these passages were written. Nevertheless, the Council

\* Fœdaverunt illum propria fascinora, sed confessio paradisum patefecit.—(S. Chrys. de Latr.)

† Confessio est porta per quam intrant animæ ad paradisum.—(S. Albertus, S. die. Cin.)

of Trent does not hesitate to affirm that sacerdotal confession was received as a divine institution, from the earliest days of Christianity." "According to the institution of the sacrament, as we have explained," says this council, "the universal church has ever believed that the complete confession of sins was by divine right, necessary for all those who have fallen after baptism."<sup>\*</sup> We have noticed that, in the primitive church, the pardon of offences was granted publicly in the assembly of the faithful, not by virtue of any sacramental power, but as an act by which the sinner was admitted to the communion of the Church. Being convinced that the repentance was sincere, and that there was a reconciliation with God, the priests were charged to pronounce a formula, by which was manifested their conviction that God granted the remission of sins. The formula was deprecatory, and conceived in these terms: "May Jesus Christ absolve you, or may Almighty God grant you absolution and remission." This is what we shall establish by proofs in the chapter which will treat of the absolution of sins.

\* Ex institutione sacramenti jam explicata, universa ecclesia semper intellexit, institutam esse a Domino integrum peccatorum confessionem et omnibus post baptismum lapsis jure divino necessariam existere.—(Concil. Tidens., ser. xiv., cap. 5.)

But the priests, continuing their system of supremacy and power over every human creature, and usurping even divine rights, put themselves in the place of God by saying to every individual: “*Ego te abservo, in nomine,*” &c.—it is I who absolve you. This instance is unparalleled in justice administered by men. They absolve or they condemn, as if they could penetrate into the most intimate recesses of the conscience, and know with certainty the inclination and the intentions of the guilty party, from a verbal declaration, often vague, uncertain, or dissembled. So, on a question in which eternal bliss or woe is at stake, a man pronounces affirmatively, without either any witnesses or any responsibility, about whosoever delivers himself up to him; and this man may, moreover, be ignorant, fickle, undiscerning, prejudiced, superstitious, fanatical, and even incredulous. But, no matter: his sentence is irrevocable, and even God must submit to it. Nay, the man who has been defiled with the greatest crimes during the whole course of his life will be sanctified by an *ego te abservo*; he will enjoy an eternity of bliss in paradise. Such was the fate of Constantine, and, since him, of many other celebrated criminals. This theological doctrine bears a strong resemblance to that of the Stoics, who, according to Plutarch, “pretended that goodness does not increase by duration; that the man who has been

good for an hour will not be less happy than he who has constantly practised virtue, and has happily dedicated to it the whole course of his life."\* In the primitive church, confession was made only in the presence of the faithful, and penance, as well as reconciliation, took place only according to their decision. Private confession between individuals was practised in the same spirit. But everything was altered in auricular and sacerdotal confession. The priest became sole arbiter of consciences. Soon afterwards, the popes and bishops deprived him of this prerogative, or, at all events, granted it him only in certain circumstances, an usurpation that was sanctioned by the councils of Latran and Trent. It was easy for the popes, by means of this measure, to give to consciences a direction favourable to their interests or to their domination.

It was for the self-same purpose that the popes gave to monks the right of directing consciences, a function contrary to their institution, whilst they took it away from the secular priests, to whom it exclusively belonged. This privilege, conceded more particularly to the mendicant friars by Nicholas V., in 1447, was contested by a few French theologians, and especially by the university. The monks applied to Pope Sextus III., who, far from

\* Plato, on Common Notions against the Stoics.

yielding to reason, confirmed the bull of Nicholas V. But the university having shown their sense of these pretensions by expelling the monks from *its body*, the same pope thought it was his interest to yield for the time being. This conflict was renewed at different periods. But the policy of Rome, ever persevering in her designs, ultimately succeeded in securing the direction of consciences for the monks. She was not unmindful of the services which these servile corporations, blindly devoted to her orders, had done and might still do her by struggling against those who opposed her usurpations and encroachments. She called to mind the success she had obtained with the assistance of the Dominicans, Franciscans, and above all with the Jesuits—that supplementary militia of the monastic system—to maintain her domination at all times and in every place. Thus, confession given up to the monks became a means of directing consciences at pleasure, and of bringing the Catholic world into subjection by corrupting simultaneously religion and morality.

Efficiunt animos humiles formidine divum  
Depressosque premunt ad terras.\*

This is what we shall establish by more than one proof in the course of this work.

\* Lucret., lib. i., ver. 63.

Confession having become sacramental, assumed in the hands of the regular and secular clergy both new forms and a greater development, and gave rise to opinions and practices till then unknown. Sins were divided, subdivided, and minutely specified, nay, some were imagined which had never taken place; lastly, cases of conscience and reserved cases were established, founded upon the authority of the fathers, the popes, the councils, or upon tradition. This was that new theological science which was recorded in rubbish under the titles of *Summa*, *Curatorum Manipuli*, *Poenitentialia*, *Confessorum Specula*, *Instructiones*, *Directoria Casus Conscienciarum*, &c.

Therein we find catalogues, according to their imaginary degree of gravity, sins, not according to the true doctrine of the Gospel, or conformable to natural law, but according to laws, precepts, and arbitrary or absurd practices, established by the corrupters of Christianity, and for the interest of their domination. Thence it must necessarily have followed that the most virtuous persons, incessantly committing sins, believed themselves obliged to have incessant recourse to confession; for duty requires a reconciliation with God every time he has been offended, as Cassiodorus expresses it: “One generally suffers the pain of death for having avowed a single crime to a lay judge, whereas frequent confession made to God is without

danger, and, on the contrary, procures us salvation.”\*

Long experience having taught the court of Rome that confession was the most efficacious of all means for securing the dominion of consciences, it earnestly recommended it. It was for the purpose of inculcating it in the minds of men that it was published in several treatises particularly consecrated to this subject. This is a doctrine that has been adopted both in theory and practice in the different monasteries, but principally in convents of women. Both men and women are generally accustomed to make, besides the sacramental confession made to the priest-director, a confession several times in the week, either to their male or female superior, or before the whole community. This confession, known by the ascetic name of *coulpe*, is considered as obligatory as sacerdotal confession; and not to declare, not only transgressions of the rule, but indifferent, trifling, ridiculous, or imaginary acts, thoughts, and scruples of conscience multiplied *ad infinitum*, is to cause oneself to be guilty of a sin very often capital. People of the world, who have never dived into investigations of this nature, are ignorant of what is passing in convents, the bigotry which reigns there, the despotism of the superiors, especially in the

\* Cassiodor. in Psalm. 74.

convents of females, and the blind and slavish obedience to which the subordinates are subjected.

For what reasons do priests so strongly recommend frequent confession?..... Because they would speedily lose their credit and influence, if people had not recourse to them after committing crimes or serious faults; for honest people could do without their ministry, even when they would take the communion, as was the case in the primitive Church.\* But the tribunal of confession became a place where priests dictate every day their orders and the opinions to which people ought to submit; and where, as absolute masters of consciences, they command without control and without appeal. In order to excite Catholics to conform to a practice from which such excellent advantage has been derived, the clergy must indeed have presented it as very profitable to salvation.

“ Every time you confess,” say the theologians, “ when you have sinned, you obtain grace and the remission of your sins. If you confess four times a year, grace will abound four times; and if you draw near the tribunal of confession more often, grace will abound in proportion. It is difficult to

\* Qui Eucharistiam postquam de more in particulas dividerant, unicuique ex populo permitterent, ipsum sibi partem sumere. Optima enim est sua cuique conscientia ad hoc, ut res objectat, accurate vel eligat.—(Clemen. Alexan. Stro., liv. i.)

know the full value of grace ; but it is certain that the least particle of grace is preferable to the possession of the whole world.”\*

It was in order to keep consciences continually in tutelage, to form and direct them from the earliest age even to the jaws of death, to the gates of heaven or hell, that absolution was granted according to need. It was in order to follow and scrutinize consciences wherever they might take refuge, that they caused general confessions of sins already pardoned to be reiterated, as if they had thought that absolution acquired more strength and value by being given several times. In this they did the reverse of the axiom, *non bis in idem*.

The practice of general confessions was likewise a monastic invention. We find some traces of it in the fourth and sixth centuries. Saint Eloi, who lived at the latter period, confessed to a priest the sins of his whole life.† A saintly bishop of Canterbury (Epist. 66) counsels the making of general confessions. They even carried this usage so far as to confess their sins every day. What proves

\* Unde si quater in annum confitetur, quater etiam augetur gratia, et si pluries confitetur, pluries augetur gratia. Quanti autem valoris sit gratia, vix potest agnosci hoc autem est certum eligibiliorem rem esse minimum gradum gratiae, quam possidere perpetuo universum orbem.—(T. Toletanus, Instit. Saeerd. ad Pœnit., lib. vi., c. 51, art. 3 et 4.)

† Omnia adoloscentiae coram sacerdote confessus est acta.—(Sirmond in analect. ad Capit. Caroli. Calvi.)

the absurdity and inutility of these confessions is, that they who submitted to them committed the same faults every day. This frequency of confession, or penance, the result of the facility with which forgiveness was granted, has produced, in all ages, a kind of dissoluteness which has very often been complained of. A Council of Toledo says on this head : “ As we have perceived that several persons in the Churches of Spain did penance, not according to the canons, but in the most shameful manner, so that they asked for a reconciliation every time they chose to sin, it is in order to put an end to such execrable presumption that the holy council enjoins, &c.”\* Thus it is that they have caused people to become hypocritical and sacrilegious by enjoining frequent confessions, which are often observed only to gain a reputation for piety.

People submitted without difficulty to these often repeated confessions, on account of the penance being easy. Thus, a rich man who supported a great number of dependants, could in three days wipe out a seven years’ fast. He com-

\* Quoniam comparimus, per quasdam Hispaniarum ecclesias, non secundum canones, sed foedissime pro suis peccatis homines agere pœnitentiam, ut quoties peccare libuerit, toties a presbyteris se reconciliari expositulent : ideo pro coercenda tam execribili præsumptione, id a sancto concilio jubetur, etc.—(Concil. Tolet., lib. iii., cap. 4.)

missioned eight hundred and forty individuals to fast for him during three days, eating only bread and abstaining from meat and wine.\*

“It had been imagined,” says Fleury, “but I know not on what grounds, that every sin of the same species merited its penance; that if a homicide, for instance, was to be expiated by a penance of ten years, it would require a hundred years for ten homicides, which rendered penance impossible and the canons ridiculous. There were psalms, genuflexions, lashes of discipline, alms, pilgrimages, and all actions which may be done without one’s being converted. Thus, by reciting psalms, or by flagellation, one redeemed in a few days several years of penance.”†

The monks also undertook to perform the penance imposed upon the sinner, either through a principle of Christian charity, ill-understood it is true, but for the most part for ready money, which had a character of rapacity. “Penances performed by others,” says Fleury, “were still less efficacious in correcting, and the lashes which a holy monk gave himself for a sinner were not a medicinal penance for such sinner.”‡ This kind of compensation must have been, as we may

\* Spelman, Concil., t. i., p. 443—478.

† Fleury, Discours sur l’ Hist. Ecclés., dis. iii., n. 16.

‡ Fleury, Ibid.

suppose, very much to the taste of wealthy profiliates.

Carpentier cites two instances of this kind; one from a chronicle of 1080, and the other as related by Muratori. The first is that of two penitents, one named Alfred and the other Bernard, upon whom the Bishop of Bologna had imposed a penance of thirty years. But they having stated to him the impossibility of their performing it, the bishop ordered them to give to the *hospice* of Saint Sauveur the tenth part of all they possessed; which was done; and, in consequence of this arrangement, the abbot undertook, with his monks, to perform in lieu of the guilty party twenty years of their penance.\* The other instance, which dates from 1154, is that of a penitent who humbly begs the monks to take upon themselves three years of a penance imposed upon him by the Bishop of Arezzo, which was accepted.†

After having decoyed people to the tribunal of confession with the favours of grace as a bait, it

\* Qua de causa præfatus episcopus præcepit nobis pro remissione peccatorum nostrorum ad hospitium S. Salvatoris . . . omnium bonorum nostrorum rerum decimas fideliter offeramus; et ita recipimus . . . Proquo præfatus Rusticus abbas, cum suis fratribus vigenti annos de pœnitentia illorum reciperunt.—(Carpent., Glossa nov., t. iii., p. 330.)

† Et insuper a me humiliter exorati, onus trium annorum de pœnitentia mea super se suscepserunt, quam de peccatis meis ab Aretino episcopo acceperam.—(Id. ibid.)

was expedient to inspire lukewarm and careless minds with the fear of the demon. "The demon," said the same theologians, "masters the man who hides his sins within himself and does not reveal them to the physician of souls; but, on the contrary, when man has recourse to confession, the demon is intimidated, and dare not approach him who reveals his temptations to a confessor."\*

These two means, whatever be the influence they may have over minds, did not seem sufficient: it was necessary to give devout souls to understand that the most holy acts, the most signal good works, were of little value or merit in the eyes of God, without the practice of an often repeated confession; for, "even though any one should happen to fall into sin after this confession, grace is recovered by a new confession, and with it the merit of the actions which sin had rendered criminal....Grace is ever increasing by confession in him who already enjoys it, and the same good works become more meritorious than they would have been, had so much grace not been possessed."†

\* Dæmon enim multum surgit contra hominem, dum peccata secum recondita habet, nec medico spirituali aperit; ut cum homo ad confessionem confugit, timet dæmon, nec audet accedere ei qui omnes ejus suggestiones confessario manifestat. (Carpent., Glossa nov., t. iii., p. 330.)

† Et liceat postea peccat, tamen cum iterum redit ad gratiam, illi restituuntur bona illa opera quæ per peccatum mortificata erant. . . . Quod si est in gratia, semper cum illi augeatur gratia per confessionem, eadem opera bona fiunt

But, according to the doctors, who call themselves the only persons orthodox, there is neither grace nor salvation for those who reject confession and refuse to adopt their doctrine. In order to weaken any opinion which may be opposed to these maxims, they schemed, with the assistance of the secular power, the prohibition of the sacraments and ecclesiastical burial to any persons who confess their sins to non-orthodox priests. Thus it was that they succeeded, towards the middle of the eighteenth century, in persecuting the Jansenists, and in causing the triumph of the bull *Unigenitus*, by exacting tickets of confession; a violence which then introduced a sacrilegious commerce of these tickets, even as it exists in Spain and Italy at the present day, as we shall explain in another chapter.

The usage of auricular confession becomes modified according to time, circumstances, opinions, or interests. The period is not very distant when all Catholics, whatever might be their opinion, rank, or social position, mechanically submitted to confession, and had recourse to a priest to comfort their consciences or reassure their minds against the fear of hell. Later, when knowledge had been diffused among the higher classes of society, it was done through a faint shadow of belief, the

magis meritoria quæ non essent, si tanta gratia non esset.—  
(Carpent., Glossa nov., t. iii., p. 330.)

effect of education, habit, or example, or, lastly, through social or political *convenances*. At the time of our first revolution, confession, forsaken by a great number of persons, was an affair of decorum, when any one happened to be in danger of death; accordingly, it fell into almost general disuse from that period down to that of the empire (of Napoleon). Then religious hypocrisy having prevailed, confession became a new dogma; it increased during the restoration; and has lastly become, in our time, a fashionable custom to which young men and women must submit; the former, through the disciplinary coercion of our colleges and boarding-schools; the latter, through the effect of that vulgar opinion which always allies virtue to the outward practices of religion. The fact is, the repugnance to this ancient custom is so firmly established in our minds, that, in spite of all their efforts and preaching, there are, at this moment, but a very few persons in France who submit to it.

In seeking the cause of this state of things, we shall find that auricular confession, which forms one of the essential bases of Ultramontanism, follows the destiny of that religion.\* It increases or diminishes according to the vicissitudes of the latter. Experience demonstrates that the material adoption

\* See E. Quinet's *Ultramontanism*. Chapman, London, 1845.—Transl.

or rejection of any religious observance depends on the will, action, and influence of governments, as we have already observed. Thus, in 1792, the practices of public worship were seen to be almost abandoned, even by a superstitious people, in consequence of the opinions emitted by those who governed at that period, whereas they revived again when protected, favoured, and salaried by Napoleon, who considered them as instruments calculated to undermine our liberties. It is owing to the same causes and the same views that the spirit of bigotry, or rather religious hypocrisy, has somewhat increased down to the present day; for we cannot call that religion which is only a belief and a pursuance of practices to be rejected or adopted by policy, according to material interests, or to be outwardly followed, in order to conform to the *government* opinion in fashion, or to what is termed social *convenances*. However, it is consoling to find, amid this subversion of every religious principle, several persons imbued with sentiments more conformable to the divine law, and who strive to practise its precepts, without needing to have recourse to a Jesuit, or any ignorant fanatical monk.

The character and form of auricular confession consist of contradictory conditions so manifest, that the application of them is, in many cases, impossible. For, indeed, we are told that the apostles,

and they who succeeded them, down to the missionaries of the present day, have converted towns, cities, and even whole provinces. How then could they, being alone, or, at all events, very few in number, in the very commencement of Christianity, shrive such numerous populations in so short a space of time? How could the Barbarians, who, after having been converted, returned in crowds to their ancient errors, again to embrace Christianity anew, have been confessed by one or two priests who were alone among them? This is what proves that, in the commencement, auricular confession was unknown. Indeed, in the Church of Constantinople, which was one of the most numerous in Christendom, there was but one single priest who heard such persons as desired to confess their sins.

The conditions of this dogma established by the councils are, that the priest, to remit sins, is obliged to know them; it is, therefore, indispensable to specify them to him, with every circumstance, which is impossible in the cases we have just mentioned, and still more so when a numerous army is on the eve of battle. Yet theologians affirm that, in the latter case, as in that of imminent danger, a soldier is obliged, upon pain of mortal sin, to confess to a priest. If there be a precept generally acknowledged by all theologians, it is that which obliges us, "on every occasion when there is any

danger or probability of dying, as on a voyage, &c., or any event in which death may be imminent, to confess, if we are guilty of any mortal sin."\* That is a very common case, especially with the military. Now, I ask, how could an almoner of a regiment incline his ear to such a considerable number of individuals? accordingly he does not, but confines himself, without hearing anybody, to pardon all their sins by the sole virtue of the words, *ego te absolvo*. This was the means they discovered to get out of the difficulty, by saying the intention and will are sufficient, and that sins are pardoned, seeing the impossibility of confessing them. Therefore it is not the priest who pardons, since he has no knowledge of the sins: it can be but God, who alone knows them. The ministry of the priest must be, consequently, as useless in this case as in every other. Besides, where is the use of giving absolution to a multitude of men, the half of whom are unworthy of it—to people who are too commonly disposed to pillage and rapine, and ready to plunge into the same crimes twenty-four hours after they have received absolution? Is not this profaning what you call a sacrament? As to God, he grants remission only to those whose hearts are truly contrite, and he often refuses it to those upon whom it is lavished by the priest. Moreover, when

\* Sylvius, Suppl., q. vi., art. 5.

confessions do happen in regiments, they are given in an off-hand way, like that made by Lahire, who, going to fight at the siege of Montargis, in 1427, found a chaplain upon the road, whom he told to give him absolution, and that *speedily*. The latter, proposing to shrive him, Lahire replied, *he had no leisure, for he must promptly smite the enemy*;—that he had done WHAT SOLDIERS ARE ACCUSTOMED TO DO; *thereupon the chaplain dealt him absolution, even as he was.*

What we have just related is not the only contradiction in auricular confession. We have spoken of those French knights who, finding themselves in great peril in Egypt, confessed their sins to one another. We also find that people used to call sometimes several priests, before whom they made their confession, and received thus a three-fold or four-fold absolution, which, according to appearances, was considered as being far more efficacious. It was not uncommon, in the middle ages, for a person to have several confessors who listened simultaneously to the declaration of the sins, and afterwards gave him absolution! This confession was sacramental: the Fathers of the council of Troyes speak of this practice in a letter written to Pope Nicholas about the year 858.\* We find a remarkable instance of it in Saint Martha, who relates that Richard I., surnamed Cœur-de-Lion,

\* Voy. Labbe, Concil., t. viii., p. 872.

having been mortally wounded at the siege of Chaluz, in Limousin, sent for threc abbots of the Cistertians, to whom he declared his sins.

But, what is not less singular, is to see a husband and a wife making simultaneously and at the same instant their confession in presence of the same priest, a practice which was prohibited by Clement VIII.\* People used even to confess by proxy or by signs, when they were deprived of the use of speech.† It must have required a clever pantomime to render intelligible every detail and circumstance which ought to be specified in auricular confession. It is especially difficult to know how they could manage to make known the sins committed against the sixth‡ commandment of God without offending decency.

Ultramontane theologians have also admitted that a married woman, who has an unlawful intimacy with a priest, may confess her sins to him and receive a valid absolution, if she repent of her conduct. Sins are likewise effaced, and the gates of paradise opened, by virtue of an absolution given by an atheistical priest, or any infamous

\* Tollendus abusus ubi est ut vir atque uxor simul et eodem tempore eidem presbytero confiteantur.—(Bullari.)

† Cum non potest verbo, teneatur enim signo vel nutu confiteri, ut in mutis contingit; eo meliori modo, quo potest, et vera est confessio.—(F. Toletanus instruct. Sacerdot. ad Pœnit., lib. iii., c. 6, art. 2.)

‡ The seventh with Protestants.—Transl.

wretch, such as Mingrat, who used to shrive, absolve, abuse, assassinate, and cut his female penitents to pieces.

The means of making people adopt any absurd opinions could never be the use of reason. This is a faculty which they have always taken care to proscribe, whenever the question has been to deceive credulous and ignorant men. They reckoned that success would be secured by substituting the authority of miracles to that of reason. This is indeed what happened, when it was necessary to make people believe that confession was a condition of eternal salvation. Bede tells us that this means was employed in his time, when he relates the history of a soldier who, after having led a very licentious life, fell dangerously ill. "The King," says this historian, "had exhorted him several times to confess his sins in the manner of Christians, before he left this life; the latter paid no attention to this advice; but he had, before his death, a vision, which warned him that he was justly condemned to eternal torments for having neglected and deferred to confess his sins—*Neglectæ dilatæque confessions pœnas justissimas dedisse.*"\*

Bellarmino mentions this miracle to prove the obligation of confession.

\* Bed., Hist. Britan., cap. 14.

The writers of the life of Saint Bernard relate that this saintly personage wrought a miracle in order to convince the incredulous of the authenticity of confession. According to them, “a nobleman fell dangerously ill, and lost his senses and the use of his speech. Then his children and friends sent for Bernard, who, finding him in this same state, said to those who were present: ‘ You are not ignorant that this man has vexed the churches, oppressed the poor, and grievously offended God. If you will believe me and do what I tell you, restore to the churches whatever has been taken from them: the patient will recover his speech, make a confession of his sins, and receive devoutly the divine sacraments.’ They followed the advice of the saint, who began immediately to pray; he performed mass, but scarcely had he finished, when they came to tell him that Jubert—this was the name of the patient—was speaking and asking to confess his sins, which he accordingly did.”

Here is another miraculous fact, not less authentic, that there can be no salvation for sinners without sacerdotal confession: “A brigand having been beheaded by his enemies on the top of a mountain, his head rolled down to a village situated at the foot of this mountain, and began to cry:—*“Holy Virgin Mary, give me a true confessor.”* Some one having heard it, went to fetch a confessor, and

the latter having arrived, sat down and received the confession made by the head. So, astonished by this prodigy, he gave it absolution.”\*

It would be easy to produce several other miracles, performed at different periods, and in divers countries; but, in order not to tire the reader with such impostures, we shall remain satisfied with quoting what is related on this same subject by Cardinal Hugo. After having asked himself this question, “Where is Satan?” and having answered, “he dwells in those who will not confess;” he next relates the history of a woman of distinction, named Clara, who, supposed to be dead, returned to life when they were about to put her in the ground. But, as she had been to hell, she gave a description of the torments which are suffered there for whatever crimes are committed, and especially for that of not having confessed one’s sins. The guilty are alternately boiled in coppers and cast into a river of freezing water.†

The opinion that the end of the world is approaching, diffused throughout Christendom, did

\* Advenit presbyter, sedet et loquente capite, compaginato, confessionem illius audivit, etc. . . . Quo sacerdos, auditio, miratus est, et statim ubi hoc dicentem et confitentem absolvit.—(Thomas de Canti-Pré, de Opib., lib. ii., c. 39.)

† Interprét. du 13 v. du 2 ch. de l’Apocalypse. Ubi sedes est satanae? in illis enim mansionem facit qui peccata nolunt confiteri.

not less contribute to propagate confession than to augment the riches of the clergy, especially of the monks; and we see that, in this last point of view, they know how to derive advantage from the new sacramental dogma.

Offerings, in the ancient Christian church, were entirely voluntary. Every one contributed, according to his zeal and his means, to the relief of the poor and to the support of the priests. But the clergy, having made themselves the depositaries and dispensers of offerings and donations, a patrimony was gradually formed which increased prodigiously, from the largesses made by Constantine and his successors.

The desire of acquiring, increasing with the desire of enjoyments, legitimated every means, and sacred things were put up for sale like common merchandize. Then confession, absolution, and indulgences, which were the consequences, became a new and abundant source from which they drew most plentifully. Offerings and contributions, granted from benevolence at first, became obligatory, and the priests exacted a salary for the administration of the sacraments, like a physician for the administration of his medicaments. Then it was, as people have said, *Religion brought forth wealth, but the daughter had devoured her mother.*\*

\* Religio peperit divitias, et filia devoravit matrem.

It was in the same spirit that the councils, in order to surmount the obstacles which the interests of private individuals brought into opposition with those of the clergy, enacted, upon pain of eternal damnation, that offerings should be made regularly in the churches. Thus a synod held at Mayence, in 813, decreed that the people should make oblations, "for," said they, "oblations are a great remedy for souls."<sup>\*</sup> The good Parisians, more devout and credulous in the thirteenth century than their descendants are in the nineteenth, paid ready money to the priest to whom they went to confess their pranks, as we see in a charter of 1224, in which there is a mention of *denarii qui dantur in confessionibus*. This practice of selling the sacrament of confession for cash, which was not new at that period, existed in 1476, and has not yet ceased at the present day, at least when the priest takes the trouble to go and confess people dangerously ill in bed. We find in Carpentier the following passage, which proves that the tax laid upon confessions was rigorously exacted, and that the priests did not give credit, since they who had no money were obliged to borrow it, in order to be able to confess their sins and take the communion at Easter: "The same Havart demanded of this same Thomassin to lend him five

\* Synod. Maguntina, an. 813.

sous and a half, *pour soy confesser et ordonner à Pasques.*"\*

The following fact, borrowed from an old chronicle, teaches us what was, in those times of ignorance and superstition, the spirit and character of confession ; and, what is not less shocking, is that girls prostituted themselves in order to be able to pay the confessors for the remission of their sins. "The suppliant having met a young girl of fifteen or sixteen years of age, *lui requist qu'elle voulust qu'il eust sa compagnie charnelle*: to which she consented ; among other things he had promised to give her a robe and chaperon, and money to buy shoes and to go to confess on Easter-day."†

It was not without a motive that the popes established auricular confession ; for, besides the augmentation of power and influence throughout Christendom, acquired by this institution, it has been to them an inexhaustible mine of wealth, whether by means of the cases which they reserved to themselves, and the remission of which is heavily paid, or by the exclusive power of granting indulgences, by means of which souls are preserved or liberated from the pains of purgatory : a simoniacal traffic and commerce, disguised under the barbarous name of *componande*, which is still practised in our own time, although it is as con-

\* Carpentier, Glossar. novum. Vide Confessio, No. 4.

† Carpent., Supplém. à Ducange, *verb. Confession.*

trary to the spirit and laws of Christianity as to those of morality ; although it has been condemned by the decisions of the clergy of France, in 1682, and by the ancient laws of the kingdom, and by the concordat in 1801. But the court of Rome, greedy after riches, never ceases, under the mask of religion, to cry to Catholics : “ I have dispelled your iniquities, like clouds, and your sins like mists ; return to me, for I have redeemed you.”\*

\* Delevi ut nubem iniquitates tuas, et quasi nebulam peccata tua ; revertere ad me, quoniam redemi te.—(Isaiah, c. xliv., v. 22.)

---

## CHAPTER VIII.

### PROGRESS OF AURICULAR AND SACERDOTAL CONFESSiON AMONG CHRISTIANS.

---

CONFESSiON made publicly before the assembled faithful, or privately among one another, having gradually fallen into disuse in the Church, was preserved among the monastic corporations, as we have observed in the preceding chapter; with this difference, that the heads of these orders reserved forgiveness to themselves alone, by virtue of their office as priests. This practice, which is found to be prescribed in the regulations of almost every monastery, dates from very remote antiquity, since it was enacted by Saint Antony, as we are told by Saint Athanasius in his life of that anchorite. "Observe what follows," says the latter to that monk, "that you may avoid sin. Let every

one examine himself and write down the actions and affections of his soul, in order that he may confess them to another. It is certain that not only he will be preserved from sin through the fear and shame of the avowal that must be made of them, but also from evil thoughts. Who does not seek to conceal his sins? Who would not rather lie than avow his faults? As nobody is impudent enough openly to declare himself guilty of impudence, so also, if we register the thoughts we are to declare to others, we shall be deterred by this avowal from wicked thoughts, and shall watch over ourselves more carefully.”\* Saint Basil imposed the same practice, with this particular circumstance, that he especially designates those among them who were to pardon delinquents; which tended to auricular confession. He enjoins to “open the most secret recesses of their souls to those of their brethren whose office

\* Fiat hæc observatio ad eavenda peccata. Actiones animique affectiones, velut alii aliis mutuo renuntiatur, singuli apud se notent atque conscribant, nec dubium quin pudore ac metu ne patefiat, non a peccato solum, verum a pravis cogitationibus sibi prorsus caverit. Quis enim peccavit, latere non sat agit? Etiam mentium potius quam et peccavisse ipsum innotescat? Ut igitur in aliorum conspectu nemo adeo impudens est qui scortari sustineat, ita sibi cogitationes alii aliis enarratur, ac renuntiatur scribamus; ipso patefactionis pudore deterriti a sordibus cogitationibus ipsos impensius custodiamus.—(Ambros., in vita S. Anton.)

and faculty are to cure the faults of delinquents by indulgence.\*

The secular priests, following the example of the monks, gradually seized upon the power which laymen had enjoyed, and reserved to themselves exclusively the knowledge of sins, as well as the power of forgiving them—"an attribute," said they, "which God had granted to them alone." We find that the origin of this usurpation is due to the fathers of the Greek Church, who invented a word signifying that the priests were *mediators* between God and men—an expression used for the first time in the Latin Church by Saint Jerome.

A practice so onerous, so tyrannical, so contrary to the ancient discipline of the Church, could be established but gradually and by long-continued efforts of popes, bishops, and monks. They had recourse to forced or mystical interpretations of the Scriptures, to the supposition of imaginary traditions and miracles, to councils, forged decretals, excommunication, persecutions, and even to temporal punishments, towards those who refused to submit to this new yoke. Lastly, they drew up those long and strange categories of sins and cases of conscience, unknown in the primitive Church, and

\* *Mentis suæ arcana aperire fratribus in quibus datum negotium illud est, ut adhibitis facilitate ac misericordia ægrotantes curen t.*

invented to give more development and weight to auricular confession. The casuist doctors, interested in establishing this system, went to hunt even in the Old Testament for arguments to support it. Thus the word *confessio*, which means *profession of faith*, was transformed into sacramental confession. They also pretended to find it as a divine institution in the New Testament, though it is not to be discovered there, by dint of arbitrary suppositions and interpretations which accommodate themselves to everything: it was the same with the fathers of the Church, who were made to say things they had never thought of. Had auricular confession been sacramental in their time, it would have been mentioned clearly and precisely in a hundred places in their numerous works, but it is nowhere to be found.

What has made of religious practice an inextricable chaos of contradictions, obscurity, and uncertainty, is their mania of wishing to find for a passage—for a word—ten significations where often there was none, and to make everything yield to such and such opinions. Thus it is that Saint Jerome finds several meanings in the Apocalypse: “*In verbis singulis multiplex intelligentia.*” One single instance, which relates to the subject we are treating, will suffice to teach us to what a pitch of temerity this system of figurative, mystical, and symbolical explanations has been carried.

Bellarmino, that intrepid doctor who followed in this the system of his predecessors and contemporaries, after having said that *symbolical theology is not argumentative*, adds: “When God required first from Adam and Eve, and afterwards from Cain, the confession of their sin, he required at the same time that it should be made not only from the heart, but also with the mouth—not only in general, but also in detail—not only before God, but also before his minister; for it was the angel, under a human form, who interrogated him in the afternoon, whilst he was walking in Paradise. Whence we see there is a great similitude between this confession and that made in these days to the priest, who is also the angel of the Lord, as says Malachi, in the second chapter; so that it is justly said that one is the figure of the other.”\* Let us quote one passage more, or rather more trash, of

\* *Theologia symbolica non est argumentativa. Ubi Deus primum ab Adamo et Eva, deinde a Cain confessionem peccata exegit, in his locis exigatur, non solum cordis, sed etiam oris; non solum in genere, in speciali, nec tantum coram Deo, sed etiam coram ejus ministro; nam interrogatio illa facta est per angelum, in forma humana apparentem; ut patet ex eo quod ambulabat in paradiſo ad horam post meridianam. Ex eo intelligimus magnam fuisse similitudinem inter illam confessionem et eam quae nunc fit sacerdoti, qui est etiam angelus Domini, teste Malachia, cap. 2; nec sine causa dicitur una fuisse figura alterius.*—(Bellarm., I. ii., c. 3, § 1, de Pœnitent.)

the same writer, who tells us: "Certainly, if *figural*, confession was established by God, and is of divine right, how much rather must *figurative* confession have been instituted by God, and be necessarily of divine right."\* Such are the arguments by means of which impassioned theologians created the practices they wished to impose upon men.

But, in order to give more credibility to the dogma of auricular confession, these doctors had recourse to tradition, which might be called *ultima ratio ecclesiæ*, but which, however, is, of all proofs, the most objectionable and the most uncertain: it has, indeed, been likewise produced by every religion and even by certain philosophers. The Brahmins, the Bouddhists, and the Pagans, have deceived credulous ignorant men with the magic power of tradition. Indeed, it was ever a grand argument to authorize and consecrate errors, prejudices, and superstitions among the people. "This opinion," Plato would say, "comes from the ancients—it must be adopted; for it is neither right nor necessary to confirm it by probable reasons."† This was, and still is, the reasoning of

\* Nam profecto si confessio figuralis erat a Deo instituta et necessaria jure divino, quanto magis confessio figurata esse debeat a Deo instituta et necessaria jure divino.—(Bellarm., l. ii., c. 3, § 1, de Pœnit.)

† Priscis itaque viris est. . . . Licet nec necessariis nec

theologians. "The tradition exists," would Saint Chrysostom say; "do not ask for anything more."\*

The Catholic doctors pretend that the precepts and discipline of the Church, of which we find no trace in the Gospel, have been transmitted by Jesus Christ and his apostles from age to age without the least alteration, and that consequently we ought blindly to believe in them, because tradition cannot err and is infallible; whereas the Gospel is obscure and susceptible of several contradictory significations. It is true that this obscurity has given rise to a multitude of sects; but it is not less true that tradition has varied according to places, times, and persons, religious systems or predominant interests. The infallibility of tradition is not better founded than that of the Church; for it is positive that the fathers, popes, theologians, and even the councils themselves, have been mistaken, and have committed great errors in the dogmas, in facts, and even in morality. This is easy to prove, and has been proved by several learned Protestants and Catholics. Experience has demonstrated that, in spite of the

verisimilibus rationibus eorum oratio confirmetur.—(Plat., in Thime.)

\* *Traditio est: nihil quæras amplius.*—(Chrysost., in secunda Epist. ad Thess., cap. iii.)

infallibility with which they pretend to be endowed, they are subject to the general law, *errare humanum est*, which condemns man to error. Besides, this system of infallibility, which is not to be found in the Scriptures, established in a clear and evident manner, as a fact of such vital importance ought to have been, is supported by popes and priests, who are not gifted with infallibility: other men may call themselves equally infallible, or even without making these pretensions they have the right of not acknowledging those who claim it exclusively. This is the opinion of every informed and unprejudiced person, who admits as truth, in matter of religion, only the precepts which have emanated from God. This is what theologians will never agree to, especially in what concerns auricular confession, which they are so much interested in preserving intact. Accordingly, we find that Pope Innocent accused of presumption who ever wished to avoid it. "Not knowing the ancient traditions," says he, "they are presumptuous enough to believe them corrupt.....Who may neither know nor take into consideration what has been handed down to the Roman Church by Peter, prince of the apostles, what has been observed till this day and ought to be by all."\* But an enlightened Christian will reject

\* *Dum nesciunt traditiones antiquas, humana presump-*

the doctrines of a corrupt Church, and give a preference to that of Saint Mark, who, in two verses, puts us on our guard against such deceitful traditions: “In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men.”\*

The majority of Catholic theologians allow that auricular confession is founded only on tradition. Now, we ask, can any one, after what has been said, accept such a proof? Besides, auricular confession, which had begun to be practised in a few Churches, and in certain cases, five centuries before the Council of Latran, when it was enacted as obligatory for the first time—this confession, I say, found during all that interval men enlightened enough to oppose it. It is true, those men were menaced, persecuted by the court of Rome, and termed heretics—a reproach which the ancient fathers would likewise have made to those who would not have practised it had it existed in their time. It appears that it was towards the seventh century that the popes strove more especially to

tione corruptas putant. . . . Quis enim nesciat, aut non advertat in quod a principe apostolorum Petro Romanæ ecclesiæ traditum est, ac nunc custoditur ab omnibus debere observari.—(Innocent., Epist. ad decenti Episcop.)

† Mark, ch. vii, v. 7 and 8

introduce it into Christendom. Indeed, a certain Theodus, sent to England by the court of Rome, having been made Archbishop of Canterbury, assembled a council at Nortford, in 673, where he caused several canons, which he had brought from Rome, to be adopted. He introduced also into the same country several doctrines and practices till then unused, among which was auricular confession, which he caused to be considered as indispensable to obtain a remission of sins, whereas it had been believed, till that period, that confession made to God alone was sufficient for that purpose.\* But all these attempts, and even the canons of a few particular councils, having succeeded but locally or through particular circumstances, it was necessary to convoke a general council to impose this doctrine upon the whole of Christendom.

It was, accordingly, in 1215, that Pope Innocent III. caused auricular confession to be decreed in the council of Latran, and that a practice which had not been considered generally as obligatory till that period, was transformed, by the omnipotence and infallibility of that council, into a sacrament that all Christendom was to acknowledge. Here is the tenor of the ordinance: “Let every one of the faithful, of either sex, arrived at the age of reason, confess with exactness to the priest of the parish,

\* Egberti institut. Eccles., p. 281.

and without witnesses, all his (or her) sins at least once a year, and make every effort to perform the penance that will be imposed, receiving devoutly, at least at Easter, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, &c."\* The same pope commands physicians "to warn the patients they visit, in order that they may send to fetch a physician of souls."† Lastly, he engages the bishops to excommunicate such physicians as should fail in this duty.

The Council of Trent, composed of priests and monks, devoted to the interests of the court of Rome, confirmed, as a matter of course, the decree of the council of Latran. It pronounced an anathema against the refractory, who were then very numerous. This is its decree:—"If any one says that penance is not, in the Catholic Church, a true sacrament for the faithful, every time they commit sins after baptism, and that this sacrament was not instituted by Christ our Lord, to reconcile us with God, let him be cursed."‡ Here we must

\* *Omnis utriusque sexus fidelis, postquam ad annos discretionis pervenerit, omnia sua solus peccata, saltem semel in anno, fidelitur confiteatur proprio sacerdoti, et injunctam sibi poenitentiam propriis viribus studeat adimplere, suscipiens reverentur ad minus in Pascha, Eucharistiae sacramentum nisi, etc.*—(Innoc., Decret., lib. v., tit. 38, cap. 18.)

† *Quoties ad infirmos vocantur, ipsos ante omnia, moneant et indicant quod medicos advocent animarum.*—(In Concil. IV., Later., c. 21.)

‡ *Si quis dixerit in Ecclesia catholica poenitentiam non*

remark that the fathers of this council, after having decided that public confession, the only one practised in the primitive Church, was not obligatory, made auricular and sacerdotal confession, a sacrament and an article of faith unknown in the early ages of Christianity. The Council of Trent ought, from an analogous reason, to have decreed that one must confess to a priest before receiving baptism; for if sins cannot be remitted without an accurate knowledge of them, confession becomes as necessary in the latter case as in the former. The priest has not a greater share in the remission of sins in confession than he has in baptism. He may therefore be replaced by a layman in the former as he is in the latter. The effects of either are produced only by a sincere repentance for our faults, and by a firm resolution to conform to the law of Jesus Christ: there is, consequently, no more obligation to specify our sins in confession than in baptism.

Before the period of which we have spoken, no proof of the existence of sacerdotal confession is to be found. Not one of the authors who wrote before that time has mentioned it, as we have already

esse vere et proprio sacramentum pro fidelibus, quoties post baptismum in peccata labuntur, ipsi Deo reconciliandis, a Christo Domino nostro institutum, anathema sit.—(Concil. Trid., sess. xiv., can. 1.)

observed. It is not to be found classed either among the duties or among the obligations to which the faithful are bound. There is no mention made of it in those lives of saintly personages, wherein we find such circumstantiated details about the devotional practices to which they submitted. People are converted, and die, without having recourse to this kind of confession, which afterwards became of such frequent use. We nowhere find that people had recourse to this confession on solemn festivals, at Easter, before the communion, when they were threatened with any dangers, when going to war, in distant voyages, before doing penance, or at the point of death; there were no almoners in the armies, nor even in the palaces of kings. It would have been a sufficiently important act of religion and duty for the fathers of the Church, the historians, and all that crowd of authors who have treated of theological or ecclesiastical matters, to have spoken of it; whereas, for the last four or five hundred years, our libraries are choke-full of *Pœnitentialia*, *Confessorum Specula*, *Directoria*, *Casus Conscientiæ*, *Decisiones*, *Aphorismi*, *Curatorum Manipuli*, *Institutiones*, &c.

That sacerdotal confession is a modern institution is evidently deduced from its being totally unknown to the Christian nations that have ceased, for several centuries, to have any direct communication or connexion with the Church of

Rome: such are the Abyssinians and the Ethiopians. "Those two nations," says Castro, "consider confession as useless, even for great crimes. When they practise it, they specify neither the number nor the quality of their sins. The Jacobites," says the same traveller, "are in error in believing that confession made in secret to the priest is not necessary, but that it is sufficient to confess to God."\*

Croze makes us acquainted with the opinion of the Indians in these terms: "Tradition, which, without any proof of it being adduced, is said to have fixed the number of the sacraments to seven, is not admitted by the Christians of India, who are unacquainted with confirmation and extreme unction, and administer only two sacraments."† We have seen what ages were passed in public confession and private confession between laymen, and what time, what efforts, it cost papacy and the clergy to bring Christendom under the yoke of auricular confession; and we have also spoken of its long opposition to this kind of servitude. Indeed, it was not till after the Council of Trent that all Christendom submitted to it. The nations, for a long time, followed this practice mechanically, as is always the case in matters of

\* Alph. Castro. *odv. Hore, v<sup>o</sup> Confess., lib. iv., fol. 78.*

† Croze, *Histoire du Christianisme des Indes.*

religion. The enlightened men of the higher ranks of society kept away by degrees, and have been gradually followed by the middle classes, who, in their turn, have been imitated by the lower orders; for knowledge, which has spread on all sides since the revolution of 1789, has dispelled ancient prejudices, as degrading to religion as to human reason. So that confession, generally neglected before the restoration in 1814, has recovered from its decline only by factitious aid, which can produce but ephemeral effects. We have seen what may be the influence of a Macchiavellian government, of a perverted opinion, nay, of fashion itself, so powerful upon the mind of Frenchmen, but, above all, of the interest and the tactics of a Jesuitical clergy; and if there be any occasion to be astonished, it is that the number of real and false penitents is not more considerable.

If it happens that a greater number of women than men go to the confessional, that can be no proof in favour of this institution: it would be more easy to demonstrate the contrary. For, indeed, the cause may be perceived in an education nourished with prejudices—a narrow, futile, instruction full of vanity, to the total exclusion of reason and judgment. Add to this the constraint and habitual bondage to which persons of the fair sex are doomed by public opinion. In the eyes of many persons, a woman who is known not to go to the

confessional would be looked upon as an immoral person, and loose in her conduct. Thus, the tribunal of confession is a place of refuge for some, where they shelter themselves from the stupidity or ill-nature of the public ; for others, it is a sacred temple, where prostitution likewise finds a shelter. Who would dare to blame such women as resort to the use of this practice in honesty and conviction ?

But are we, indeed, to believe that all those persons who go to confess, act thus through conviction and a firm resolution to correct themselves of their prevailing vices ? If this were the case, should we not see them alter their conduct ? Would they not be more virtuous than those who refuse to subject their consciences to a confessor ? But it is not so : they are found to be always the same. Do they not obey their passions alike ? Are they less egotistical, unjust, ambitious, greedy of riches, or less addicted to sensuality and illicit pleasures ? Lastly, are they less ready to betray their conscience, or their native land, when the business is to promote their fortune and acquire power and influence ? Boast to us now of the utility and marvellous effects of confession made to a priest !

---

## CHAPTER IX.

### REPENTANCE AND ABSOLUTION OF SINS IN THE SYSTEM OF AURICULAR CONFESSiON.

---

THE light of reason, in harmony with the doctrine of the Gospel, teaches us that whoever has violated the law of God, can obtain pardon only in so far as he possesses the indispensable disposition: namely, a boundless love towards God, a sincere regret for having offended him, and a firm resolution never more to commit any transgressions. It would be in vain for a sinner to receive absolution from all the priests in the world, or the indulgences of all the popes who have ever existed: if he had not these conditions, he would be equally guilty in the eyes of God, and would not escape the punishment that is due to him. This is also what, in the commencement of Christianism,

was required of those who presented themselves for penance, and desired to be reconciled to the Church. The penitent was admitted to this communion according to the proofs he had given of his repentance, and of a sincere amendment, and to the conviction that they had sufficiently satisfied God. But the priests, having claimed the power of binding and loosing, reserved to themselves likewise the right of absolving, before a good conduct had borne witness to the sincerity of repentance, or the offence committed against God had been atoned by a penance in proportion to the transgression. With the aid of sacerdotal confession, an expedient was found for absolving a penitent and admitting him to the communion, every time he came to kneel at the feet of a confessor, and without any other guarantee than what he gave by reciting a *Confiteor*. This is what was complained of, in the sixth century, by the Council of Toledo: "Having heard that, in some towns of Spain, people approach the penitential tribunal in a detestable manner, *fædissime*, so that it is sufficient every time one wishes to sin, to become reconciled by priests, *ut quoties peccare libuerit, toties a presbyteris reconciliari expostulent*, it is in order to put an end to such execrable presumption, that the Holy Council orders that penance shall be done according to the ancient canons, that is to say, that he who repents of his faults shall be first

separated from the communion, *communione suspensum*, and, standing among other penitents, shall implore—shall frequently implore—the imposition of hands. After accomplishing the period of satisfaction, he shall be admitted to the communion, if the priest should think proper. But let those who relapse into their sins be punished according to the rigour of the canons, either during the time of penance or after reconciliation, *vel intra paenitentiam, vel post reconciliationem.*”

The clergy having definitively imposed upon the faithful the yoke of auricular confession, made themselves the arbiters of their salvation and eternal damnation. To do so, it was necessary to pervert alike the precepts of the Gospel and those of reason. This is what they succeeded in doing, by dint of interpretations, distinctions, and sophisms. The Gospel never ceases to repeat that we must love God with all our heart, beyond everything, and more than oneself, if we would find grace with Him; and, consequently, that we must love Him, not from the dread of the chastisements with which we are threatened, but for the sole reason that we have offended a God who, as Saint John says, “loved us long before we could love Him.”\*

The sincere and disinterested regret which is

\* Nos ergo diligamus Deum, quoniam Deus prior dilexit nos.—(Joan, Epist. 1, c. iv., v. 19.)

called perfect contrition, consists in repenting of our faults, independently of any fear of the punishments attached to sin, and in a pure love devoid of every interest. Auricular theologians have perverted the most sublime precept of the Gospel; and in the place of that reciprocal love, that boundless confidence, which, according to the words of Jesus Christ, ought to exist between God and his creature, they have substituted the fear of a slave towards an oppressive and revengeful master; they have disavowed what is said by the evangelist Saint John: “If we confess our sins to God, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”\* They supposed that, to receive a pardon for transgressions, it was sufficient to have a dread of punishments, accompanied with the absolution of which they had made themselves the dispensers. It is this state of a servile, selfish soul that they have termed attrition, and in which, as they say, there is a commencement of love towards God. How can repentance and conversion be sincere, if love towards God be not entire, but calculated only according to fear and interest? “He who fears God,” says the same Saint John, “has not a

\* *Si confiteamur peccata nostra, fidelis est et justus, ut remittat nobis peccata nostra, et emendet nos ab omni ini-  
quitate.—(Joan., Epist. 1, c. i., v. 9.*

perfect love for him.”\* And, in this case, how can the absolution of the priest, however efficacious it may be supposed to be, find grace with God?

We may conceive it possible to entertain doubts, and not to believe firmly in the existence of God; but not to have a boundless love, when one has the entire conviction of the existence of an Omnipotent Being, the Creator of all things, who is good, just, and merciful, and to feel for Him only a commencement of love, is to have none at all, and not to be a Christian. This hypothesis supposes a being and a state of things such as can exist only in the brain of certain theologians, and which is not less contrary to reason than to the texts of the Gospel.

Persons brought up in a religion which admits auricular confession, believe generally that, to obtain from God a pardon for their sins, it is sufficient to make a declaration of them to a priest, and that, after having obtained his absolution and accomplished the slight penance which he imposes, they are in the same state with respect to God as if they had never sinned. Thus it is that people create an illusion for themselves, and receive with a safe conscience an absolution which the priest gives them often at random, being unable to know

\* Qui autem timet, non est perfectus in charitate.—  
(Joan., Epist. 1, c. iv., v. 18.)

whether they are sincerely penitent. And how could they be so, when, after having confessed a hundred times, they ever relapse into the same sins, and continue till death even the same absolute course of life? What then is the result of those millions of absolutions which are daily given in all Roman Catholic countries? On the one hand, they do not arrest the course of divine justice; whilst, on the other, this facility of gaining absolution, as often as any one thinks proper, singularly favours the infraction of divine and human laws.

A modern apologist of the Christian religion has said: "The Gospel assures the penitent that his sins will be forgiven him, and the Gospel alone gives this assurance."\* Does he mean to imply that the assurance of the forgiveness of sins is essentially connected with auricular confession and the absolution given by a priest? Or does he mean that the Christian religion is the only one that gives with this condition a remission of sins? Why, all religions give the same assurance. This is what was promised to their disciples by Brahma, Bouddah, Zoroaster, Mahomet, and even by ancient and modern philosophers, such as Confucius, Pythagoras, and others who have believed in divine justice and goodness. The Jewish reli-

\* *Bienfaits de la Religion Chrétienne.*

gion made the same promise: "If the wicked will turn from all his sins, and do that which is lawful and right, all his transgressions shall not be mentioned unto him; in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live."\*

Moreover, true and sincere contrition, not that imagined by sacramental theologians, has been considered by a great number of the fathers of the Church as sufficient for the remission of sins, when it is occasioned by a disinterested love toward God; such was the opinion of Hilary, Basil, Augustin, Ambrosius, Maximus of Turin, &c. Do we not find besides, in the Gospels, several instances of persons having received the remission of their sins without any kind of confesssion, as Mary Magdalen, the paralytic, Zaccheus, and Saint Peter himself.

We have seen, from what has been previously said, that confession used to be made only in the presence of the assembled faithful, and that it was likewise they who determined the form and duration of penance. It was the same with pardon and absolution. "It is proper," says Saint Cy-

\* Si autem impius egerit pœnitentiam ab omnibus peccatis suis quæ operatus est, et custodierit omnia præcepta mea et feceret justicium et justiciam, vita vivet, et non morietur. Omnia iniquitatum ejus, quas operatus est, non recordabor: in justicia sua quam operatus est, vivet.—(Ezech., c. xviii., v. 21 et 22.)

prian, "that whatever concerns persons who have fallen into sin should be regulated according to the opinion and suffrages of the bishops, priests, deacons, confessors, and likewise in the presence of all the laity."\* According to Saint Ambrosius, it was the prayers, tears, and groans of the people, which cleansed the sinner and redeemed his sins.† When repentance seemed sincere, and the sinner had submitted with resignation and humility to his penance, they granted him forgiveness of sins and admission to the communion; which was declared in the name of the people and by the ministry of the bishops, without there having been any question of confession or absolution given in private by a priest. The bishops then laid their hands upon the sinners, pronouneing these words: "*Your sins are remitted you: God forgive you your sins.*" A learned traveller, who has carefully studied the religions of the East, informs us that this formula has been preserved with but little alteration in the Greek Church. Here it is, such as he gives it: "Pardon your servant the sins he has com-

\* Placet collatione conciliorum cum episcopis, presbyteris, diaconis, confessoribus pariter ac stantibus laicis, facta lapsorum tractare rationem.—(Cyprianus, Epist. 31.)

† Bene, ait Paulus, expurgate; vult enim operibus quibusdam totius populi purgatur, et lacrymis plebs abluitur, qui orationibus ac fletibus plebis redimitur a peccato, et in homine mundatus interiore.—(S. Ambros., de Pœnit, c. xv.)

mitted; be reconciled with him through me; I am your humble and unworthy minister. Receive him into penitence, and establish him in the bosom of your Church; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”\*

“The Greek priests,” adds the writer, “think that it is not they who cause the validity of absolution, but that it consists in sincerity of heart, the genuine contrition and submission of the penitent.” The Greek priests, according to the same author, pronounce, moreover, a prayer in these words: “Receive with your wonted kindness the penitence of your servant; do not consider the greatness of his crimes, since it is you who forget and forgive transgressions.”†

It is worthy of remark, that the formula of absolution anciently used by the Roman Church was expressed in nearly the same terms as that of the Greek. But the popes having substituted their power for that of God, and established auricular confession, were obliged necessarily to efface the name of God from the formula and replace it by their own. This is, accordingly, what happened; for the formula used before the thirteenth century was—“May Almighty God grant you absolution and the remission of your sins;” or,

\* De la Croix, *De la Turquie Chrétienne*, p. 86.

† Id., *ibid.*

"May the Almighty and merciful God grant us (or you) forgiveness, absolution, and remission of our (or your) transgressions."\* Saint Thomas, who died in 1274, says, "that the formula used before his time was deprecatory,† which was replaced by *ego te absolvo*," &c. This usurpation of the clergy commenced early, since Jerome, in explaining the passage in Saint Matthew, "*Quæcumque ligaveritis*," expresses himself thus: "The bishops and priests, misunderstanding this passage, and influenced by a pride similar to that of the Pharisees, believe they have the right to condemn the innocent and absolve the guilty, whereas God has no regard to the sentence of priests, but much rather to the conduct of the guilty."‡ Have we not a still better right to direct the same reproach to the priests of the present day who, arrogating to

\* Absolutionem et remissionem tribuat tibi omnipotens Deus. Indulgentiam et absolutionem et remissionem peccatorum nostrorum (vel vestrorum), tribuat nobis (vel vobis) omnipotens et misericors Deus.—(In Ritual. roman.) Absolutionem et remissionem tribuat tibi, omnipotens Deus.

† Formam absolutionis esse deprecatorium et vix triginta annos esse quod omnes haec forma utebantur.

‡ Iustum locum episcopi et presbyteri non intelligentes, aliquid sibi de Pharisœorum assumunt supercilium, ut vel damnent innocentes, vel solvere se noxios arbitrentur, cum apud Deum non sententia sacerdotum, sed reorum vita quæratur.—(Hieron., l. iii., in Matth., c. vi.)

themselves a power formerly denied by Saint Jerome, want, moreover, to subject us to an auricular confession unknown to primitive Christianity. Saint Chrysostom thought also that the remission of our sins depended only on ourselves, and not on the absolution given by a priest, when he said: "God has given you the power of binding and unbinding. You have bound yourselves with the chain of avarice; unbind yourselves by prescribing poverty to yourselves: you have bound yourselves with an ungovernable lust; unbind yourselves by temperance: you have bound yourselves with the heresy of Eunomius; unbind yourselves by an orthodox piety."\*

We see that, as soon as the use of public confession had been abolished, the bishops, uniting with the priests and deacons, seized on the right which had belonged solely to the assembly of the faithful, that is to say, that they imposed penance, forgave sins, and admitted to the communion, but always in the name of the Church and as its representatives. The bishops having become more powerful, more influential, and richer by the sees which they

\* Dedit tibi Deus potestatem ligandi et solvendi. Ipse te ligasti catena avaritiae; solve te ipsum amore tibi injungendae paupertatis: ipse te ligasti furioso voluptatum desiderio; solve te ipsum temperantia: ipse te Eunomii ligastii heterodoxia; solve te ipsum orthodoxae pietate.—(Chrysost., Homil. in illud quocunque lig.)

occupied, made themselves sole arbiters of confession ; and that the more easily, as particular confession, in imitation of public confession taking place only for public and scandalous transgressions, become very uncommon, so that the bishops could perform this ministry by themselves. This confession having, in course of time, been extended to less serious and common sins, the bishops being unable to suffice for every want, gave the priests and deacons the power of receiving for penance and of absolving, especially in cases of emergency. This is demonstrated in the following passage of Saint Cyprian: “ Penitents dangerously ill, or otherwise prevented, may, without waiting for our presence, have recourse to any priest who may be present, or even to a deacon if no priest is to be found, in order to make an avowal of their transgression, both to receive forgiveness of the same by the imposition of hands, and to go in peace to the Lord.”\* The council of Elvira prescribes the same rule : “ If any one be guilty of a serious transgression, let him do penance only with the

\* Si incommodo aliquo et infirmitatis periculo fuerint (pœnitentes), non expectata presentia nostra, apud præbyterum quemcunque presentum, vel si præsbyter repertus non fuerit, et cogere exitus corporit, apud diaconum quoque exomologes in facere delicti sui possunt; ut manu ei in pœnitentia imposta, veniant ad Dominum cum pace.—(Cyprian., Epist. 13 et 18.)

consent of the bishop; if, however, he should be in danger of death through the effects of his illness, it is the duty of the priest or deacon not to receive him at the communion without the order of the bishop.\* Before participating in this communion, the faithful received a general pardon for their transgressions, which was wrought, not by the fact of an auricular confession, or by any sacerdotal virtue, but by participating in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper: such was the doctrine of the ancient Christians as well as that of the fathers, which we might also quote. Let us confine ourselves to what is said by Saint Ambrosius in his book on *Penitence*: "We take the sacrament of the body of Jesus Christ, after absolution has been given to all, in order that the remission of sins may be effected by his blood."†

Confession and the remission of sins having, in course of time, undergone the different modifications and changes of which we have just spoken, at length attained the obligatory state of auricular,

\* Si quis gravi lapsu in ruinam morbis inciderit, non agat pœnitentiam sine episcopi consulta; cogente tamen infirmitate, non est præbyterorum vel diaconorum communionem talibus præstare, nisi jusserit episcopus.—(Concil. Eliber., can. 32.)

† Quotiescumque peccata donantur, corporis ejus sacramentum sumimus, ut per sanguinem ejus fiat peccatorum remissio.—(Ambros., de Pœnit., l. ii., c. 3.)

sacerdotal, and sacramental confession ; a change brought about by the policy of the popes, for the purpose of increasing the influence, authority, and wealth of the clergy. Thus it was that an avowal of transgressions, which had been exacted only in extremely uncommon cases and for notorious crimes, was prescribed to all, upon pain of eternal damnation ; and the forgiveness of sins or sanctification which had been believed to belong to God alone, was attributed to the priests, and, instead of deprecatory, it now became indicative, protestative, and judiciary—*indicativa, potestativa, judiciaria*—a theological jargon, unknown to Christians for eleven or twelve hundred years, and which Saint Thomas especially has accredited.”\*

Could there have been any right, in instituting auricular confession, to give priests a power superior to what had been enjoyed by the assemblies of Christians ? However, one was given them which the latter had never claimed, and which can belong only to God—that of blotting out sins as if they had never existed. It was afterwards laid down, conformably to this supposition, that the priest, unable to pardon without being acquainted with the transgressions, since he performed the duty of a judge, ought to receive a specified declaration of them. But, we ask, where is the

\* Thomas Aquin., Opusc. 22, de Forma absolut., c. 5.

priest who can penetrate into the recesses of the conscience, even with the aid of all the declarations made to him, to give an infallible judgment, to condemn or absolve with equity and without committing any error? It would be strange presumption to affirm anything of the sort! It would be assimilating the priest to God, and believing that God will submit to this judgment, and absolve or condemn according to this decision. Moreover, this is what Saint Augustin thought, when he said: "It is not easy for man to know the maladies of the mind of man; for no one has been able to know what concerns man, except the spirit that dwells within him. Who then can find a remedy for the malady of him whose character and sentiments are totally unknown to him?"\*

If, then, God alone can judge of the faith and repentance of the sinner, he alone can absolve him. Besides, the unanimous opinion of theologians is, that he who has committed venial sins finds mercy with God without needing to have recourse to a priest. If then the sinner can be absolved in this case, he can likewise be so in cases

\* *Principio, hominum morbos homini haud facile est noscere; nemo enim hominum quæ sunt homini novit, præter spiritum qui in ipso est. Quis igitur pharmacum adhibere possit morbo ei cuius rationem et genus nequaquam intelligit?*—(August., de Sacerd., lib. ii., c. 1.)

of mortal sins, which evidently demonstrates the uselessness of sacerdotal ministry. The case is the same in confession as in baptism: in the former, as in the latter, repentance and faith are sufficient to recover grace with God: either has its effect without it being necessary to have recourse to the priest: the interference of a layman is just as efficacious. The reasoning of Bellarmine on this subject could have been imagined only by a Jesuit. "If absolution be not a judiciary act," says he, "it can be just as well given by a layman—nay, by a woman, by a child, even by an infidel, by the devil himself, or by a parrot, if taught the words by which absolution is given."\* So then, according to Bellarmine, since a layman can administer baptism, it follows that it can be just as well given by the devil, or by a parrot. However, since theologians have allowed that demons interfere in the affairs of Christians, it would be just as reasonable to let parrots also perform a part.

Women took a very active share in the tribunal of auricular confession, as soon as the monks had gained possession of it. The abbesses of female communities, believing themselves equal in dig-

\* *Si absolutio non est actus judicialis, non minus potest laicus absolvere—imo, etiam fœmina, aut puer, aut infidelis, quispiam, aut diabolus, vel etiam psittacus, si doceantur ei verba quibus annunciatur absolutio, quam sacerdos.*

nity and power to the abbots or superiors of the monasteries of men, seized, like them, upon functions which belonged only to the bishops. Thus they appropriated to themselves, in several convents, the right of confessing and absolving the nuns who were under their command. This was not only for little peccadilloes, the infringement of the regulations, and a hundred other trifles, the non-observance of which has been and is still accounted as a sin in every convent, but also for what is designated by the term of mortal sins, that abbesses used to give absolution.

These abbesses, besides their ordinary jurisdiction, could delegate ancient nuns to replace them in this ministry, and their approbation was not less necessary to the validity of absolution than is that of the bishops relatively to the priests. They had likewise the right of reserving to themselves certain cases which they alone could absolve. They who were charged to confess the sisters were bound to secrecy, excepting with the abbess, who, trusted with the direction of souls, ought necessarily to know the state of conscience of each of the sisters. This is, moreover, a principle of right, not only in convents and Jesuitical seminaries—that ordinary confessors ought to reveal to the superior any sins that may be injurious to religion and to the order and discipline of these houses. It was that they might become acquainted with what-

ever is passing throughout Christendom, that the popes appropriated to themselves reserved cases, and that the superior of the Jesuits, residing at Rome, causes accounts to be given to him of everything important that may have been discovered by the confessors of his order, either for their own corporation or for the interests of the court of Rome. It would be fastidious to enter into any details about the incessantly reiterated confessions to which the monks, and especially the nuns of some convents, are subjected; the numerous scruples of conscience with which their minds are tormented, the finical and insensate practices to which they are subjected to obtain the remission of imaginary faults. Religion, intended to tranquillize and comfort the soul, thus becomes an habitual subject of doubt and fear. Codegrand, a bishop who lived in the eighth century, ordered his monks to confess their sins weekly to a priest or to himself.\* But, besides the frequent confessions which were made to the directors of the convents, the friars or nuns confessed their sins to one another, or to their superiors, several times a month, a week, or even a day, as we find in an old regulation made for virgins, which Holstenius

\* Monachi (says he, in his regulation) in uno quoque sabbato, confessionem facient, cum bona voluntate episcopi aut priori suo.

mentions in his collection.\* It has been said that a wise man sins seven times a day. It was, doubtless, in consequence of this adage that imaginary sins were created, and that souls have been comforted by penances and sterile absolutions. We shall speak in the following book of the more than serious inconveniences which have been produced in convents by confession.

\* Holstenius, *Codex regularum, Regula cujusdam ad virginis* (in twenty-four articles).





BOOK II.



## ON CONFESSION IN ITS RELATION TO MORALITY.

---

### CHAPTER I.

---

#### ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE CASUISTS.

---

GOD has implanted in the heart of man a knowledge of good and evil, of right and wrong, which is sufficient, when he is not led astray by education, example, prejudices, or religious superstitions, to regulate his conduct and to enable him to perform his duty towards God, towards his neighbour, and towards himself. But theologians, professing a revealed religion, have substituted in its place a criminal code, designated by the name of cases of conscience, or penitential, to which they have forced men to submit upon pain of temporal or

eternal expiations. The doctors, or inconsiderate legists of Christianism, have given a development to their code beyond everything that had been done of this kind by the theologians of other religions. We should, indeed, have cause to be frightened if we had before us a compilation of all the laws, canons, decrees, precepts, and obligations imposed upon Christians in the general or provincial councils, in the writings of the fathers of the Church, in the bulls of the popes or mandates of the bishops—lastly, in the penitential books and writings of the Casuists, wherein the number and nature of sins have been precisely stated and determined with admirable sagacity.

The task would be too long, and we should wander from our purpose, did we undertake to present a picture of this kind: it is sufficient to mention a few of these works, especially of such as have appeared within the last few years, in which are recorded the most extraordinary cases of conscience and penitential transgressions, engendered by theological insanity. If to present to the knowledge of the public detestable opinions and principles is an opprobrium to some, it will, nevertheless, be a salutary warning to all, and the only means of putting a stop to causes of depravity, the more dangerous as they are disseminated quietly and under the cloak of religion: it will be

a motive to too confiding and over credulous persons to keep clear of an institution invented for the purpose of subjecting Christians to a shameful and intolerable bondage.

Everybody has heard of the famous work *De Matrimonio*, in which Sanchez, unveiling the mysteries of marriage, has perverted them to a degree of shameful turpitude. This writing, a true school of debauchery, printed for the first time in 1592, at Genoa, and dedicated to the Archbishop of Grenada, was approved of by ecclesiastical censorship, even with *delight*, as we find in the license, where we meet with these words—“*Legi, perlegi, maxima cum voluptate.*” This work of Sanchez, the Jesuit, has been the depository from which his brethren, manufacturers of eases of conscience, have drawn the licentious details with which they pollute the seminaries and the minds of those who are appointed to direct consciences.

Albert-le-Grand had fathomed this same indecent subject as early as the thirteenth century, in his *Commentary on the Fourth Book of Sentences*. Speaking of conjugal duties, he pleads, as his excuse, the monstrous avowals that must be heard in confession; *cogentibus monstris quæ in confessione audiuntur.* Theophilus Raymond, a Jesuit who lived in the middle of the seventeenth century, commends Albert, though he was a Domi-

nican, for having unveiled to the Casuists this kind of turpitude.

Another Casuist, named Jean Benedicti, a Franciscan friar, caused a book to be printed at Lyons, in 1584, with the title of *La Somme des Pêchés et la Remise D'iceux, dédiée à la Sainte Vierge*—a dedication which would not be accepted in these days by a harlot of Paris or London. Brantome quotes several passages from this work, which was also one of the sources whence Sanchez derived the saintly doctrine, of which the reader may form an idea by consulting the original. But the licentious manœuvres described by this monk, and the picture he gives of them, are of such lubricity that it is impossible for us to present them to the reader, in spite of our wish that he should be made acquainted with their excessive baseness. The Casuists took pleasure in diving into the most hidden mysteries of religion, assimilating them to the animal functions inherent in human nature, as is proved by a book of Samuel Schräenius, entitled *Dissertatio Theologica de Sanctificatione Seminis Mariæ Virginis in actu Conceptionis Christi, sine Redemptions Prætio, contra Figmentum Preservationis in lumbris Adami.* (Liptiae, 1703, in 4to.)

A work no less scandalous than the preceding ones, and which seems to have been imitated from that of Sanchez, was published by a priest named

Sættler, and reprinted anew by a professor of theology, with the title of *Joannis Gaspari Sættler in sextum Decalogi præceptum, etc.*, of which this is the translation: “Extracts of Universal Moral Theology on the Sixth (7th) Precept of the Decalogue, relatively to the obligations of Married Life and divers points concerning Marriage, by J. G. Sættler; with notes and new researches, by J. P. Rousselet, Professor of Theology in the Seminary of Grenoble (Cary, libr. éditeur, 1840—a vol. of 192 pages).” We will spare the reader the disgusting immorality contained in this work: he may judge of it from the title of the chapters in the original table of contents.

We find in pages 17, 23, 28, and 37, cases of conscience and questions so very disgusting upon such unheard-of crimes, that we should not dare to mention them in any language. As to the rest, these questions are not of modern invention: they date from several centuries ago—from a period of the grossest ignorance and superstition. We shall speak of them in the following chapter.

Another work which, like the preceding, is put into the hands of young seminarists, is not less likely to corrupt their morals than those of the persons who confess to them. We find in it a formal attack against our institutions and our liberty: it is entitled “*Compendium Theologiae*

*Moralis*," &c. Abridgment of Moral Theology, extracted chiefly from the works of B. Ligori, by Moullet, ex-professor of moral philosophy, printed with the permission of the superiors. (Fribourg, Labartrori, 1834, 2 vol. 8vo.)

The author is full of the grossest superstition, and, with the subtlety of his distinctions and arguments, authorises murder, theft, adultery, and other crimes. We think it our duty to make known some of these infamous maxims; for it is only by unveiling such immorality, and laying it bare to public opinion, that we shall be able to put an end to it, and inspire an aversion for a tribunal where a depraved or fanatical priest (and such are found in all religions), may so easily give way in secret, and without any responsibility towards the public, to the most shameful vices, and seduce those whom he ought to lead into the paths of virtue. For how will any one, even though by nature honest, resist, when he finds himself corrupted by obscene ideas with which his mind has been nourished, or by filth which will be incessantly inflaming his imagination.

It was natural, when addressing Catholics by whom they wished these extraordinary, or rather monstrous, maxims to be adopted, to state that they were those of the Church, and that it was indispensable to submit to them, and to make them

the rules of their conscience. With this aim in view, the author supposes a case in which an individual confesses, only after having heard that all Christian sects are equally good, and all lead to salvation ; he has believed that to be true, and he now asks whether he has sinned. Here is the answer of the Casuist : “ You are guilty of heresy, if, knowing that the Catholic Church teaches the contrary, you think that any one may be saved in any of the communions which are termed Christian ; and because you have manifested this voluntary error, you have incurred, by so doing, plenary excommunication.” (p. 499.) That is to say, “ you are damned.”

Here we have the extraordinary consequence of the preceding proposition. “ The agent obeying his chief with a good intention acts meritiously, though, by so doing, he act against the law of God—*quamvis materialiter agat contra legem Dei.*” (p. 38.) It is with such maxims as these that the confessors have excited the Ravaillacæ, Saint Bartholomew massacres, insurrections of people against legitimate authority, and the civil wars which have defiled Europe with blood, and which seem rising again, to judge from what is passing at the present day in Switzerland, from what happened against the Protestants in the South of France at the Restoration, and, lastly,

from the spirit of encroachment and intolerance with which religious corporations are animated.

It is for ever from the same maxims, that the oaths, by which people have expected to compel the priests to obey the laws and civil authority, being considered as mental restrictions, or as subordinate to the laws of the Church and to the will of the pope, are really of no value, and impose no real obligation. “*Ad nihil tenetur ex virtute religionis, cum verum juramentum non emiserit: teneatur tamen ex justicia ad præstandum; quod ficte et dolose juravit.*” (p. 221.) Our Casuist, supposing that the persons who repair to the confessional are imbued with the same Jesuitical opinions as himself, advises the priest to put to them the following question: “If any one,” says he, “accuses himself at the sacred tribunal of penitence for having taken an oath, the confessor ought to ask him whether his intention was to swear, that is to say, to call God to witness; for people often use juratory formulas without any intention of taking an oath.” (p. 221.)

Next comes the instruction which our Casuist gives to young confessors when abandoned women come to reveal to them, with precise details and circumstancies, the acts of shameful debauchery to which they have consented. The effect which these descriptions produce upon the priests is of

no consequence, provided it be without their consent, since they are fulfilling a duty of their ministry. They may read, with an equally safe conscience, whatever may be written on matters of luxury and debauchery in *books on morality*.

After having said that he who, by solicitation, address, fraud, or by promises of marriage, corrupts a virgin, is bound to make reparation only in case the thing should be known to the public, our honest Casuist adds: "If, however, his crime has remained absolutely secret, it is more than probable that, in his conscience, the seducer is bound to make no reparation." (p. 406.)

In vol. ii., p. 383, there is another combination of infamy, which could only have been imagined by doctors of the same stamp as Sanchez.

The following maxim is worthy of figuring among those with which Escobar has indoctrinated confessors. "For a marriage to be valid, there must be an internal mutual consent; for marriage is a legitimate contract that is essentially true of two persons. If, therefore, the consent of either party were feigned or fictitious, the marriage would be void." (Vol. ii., p. 216.)

Jesuits, monks, and priests, are not the only persons who have come forward to prescribe to us a new morality and new religious and political duties: the pope and the bishops have also pub-

liely entered the arena, armed with their decrees, mandates, and writings which they have spread among the people, or with polemical discussions inserted in their newspapers.

One of those who have distinguished themselves the most in this hitherto unheard-of struggle, is M. Bouvier, appointed bishop of Mans by the government of July, and since created a Roman Count by Gregory XVI. This man, the restorer of the Benedictine friars in his diocese, is the author of a work designed for the instruction of the seminaries and numerous colleges founded or directed by Jesuits in most of our departments. The following is the title: “*Institutiones Philosophiae ad usum Collegiorum et Seminariorum. Autore J. B. Bouvier, episcopo Cenomanensi, sexta edit. Parisiis, Mequinion, junior, 1841.*”

The reader may judge from the extracts which we shall give from this work, what, in the present day, are the principles of morality, religion, politics, and philosophy of the bishops and clergy of Ultramontane France,\* and what will be the re-

\* We know by this time that the clergy, or at least all the bishops, in France, are Jesuits. This cannot be doubted, for one of them has said: “*We are Jesuits—all Jesuits,*” and he has not been contradicted by any one of his colleagues, but, on the contrary, has received the adherence of his clergy.

sults of confession and education entrusted to men who preach publicly such doctrines.

As to politics, this is what we are taught by the Bishop of Mans: he terms the sovereignty of the people an impious principle, which has given rise to deplorable calamities: *Ex quo lugendæ pro-venerunt calamitates.* Supreme authority proceeds from God, and can proceed *only* from God, because civil power is but the image of paternal power, which proceeds evidently from God. God alone can exercise supreme authority, because He alone is superior to it (that is, the priests in His name). There is nothing that the prince may not do when circumstances require it: *Nihil est quod princeps facere non potest.* Princes are not properly bound by any civil laws, for they could be bound only by laws made by others. Now, that cannot be, since they own no superior in temporal matters, and their own laws cannot oblige them, because no one obliges himself (p. 605). Subjects ought, whenever the legitimate prince may order it, to take up arms against the usurper, combat, overthrow, and expel him if they can. Nay, more—any individual ought to kill him as a public malefactor, if the legitimate prince should expressly command it.”\* So, here is regicide established as a dogma of the Church; and any individual may,

\* *Arma assumere, illum expugnare, vincere et expellere,*

with a safe conscience, assassinate King Louis Philippe, should the legitimate king, Henri V., give him the order. What morality ! what a religion ! and yet our cowardly ministers do not denounce the propagators of such a doctrine to the tribunals. Will it be time to find a remedy for it when a new league is formed, and civil war has put arms into the hands of our citizens ? As to the liberty which he demands with so much ardour, what is it for ? To annihilate it the better ; and auricular confession is, of all means, the most likely to do so.

But let us see whether the bishop's religious morality be purer than his politics. Assuredly not : it is so far from being so, that, in spite of our wish to unveil to the world the licentiousness which abounds in the *Institutions philosophiques*, the laws of decency oblige us to quote in a language less delicate and less known than the French, and even to suppress several obscene passages which would be offensive to modesty. Besides no one can take it ill that we should copy expressions which a bishop has not hesitated to print in several thousands of copies.

Not doubting but confessors might be hurried

si possint ; imo privatim illum tanquam publicum malefactorem occidere, si legitimus princeps id expresse jubet.—  
(P. 628.)

away into thoughts and acts contrary to their vows by reading his book, and especially by putting to the other sex questions on which depend the validity of matrimony, the bishop points out to them an infallible means to preserve them from the danger: this consists in addressing to the holy Virgin Mary a prayer, of which he gives the formula.

For our part, we think there is no other efficacious means in this case than that formerly employed by Origen.

Modern Casuists would, doubtless, not have prescribed practices of confession calculated to poison the minds of those who teach them and of those who follow them, if they had known or been willing to make use of the counsel given to them by Saint Thomas, one of the luminaries of the Church. "Let confessors," says this father of the Church, "not descend to particular circumstances; the interest excited by a detail of such things disturbs the passions; and it may happen that the confessor, by putting questions on this subject, may do harm to himself as well as to the penitent, and the inquiry into such iniquities may occasion the ruin of both."\*

We think we have made our readers sufficiently

\* Non descendat nimis ad particulares circumstantias, quid hujuscemodi delectabilia, quando magis in speciali con-

acquainted with the works on *moral theological philosophy*, which are put, at the present day, into the hands of our seminarists, as the rule which they are to follow in the direction of souls confided to their care. The maxims in them are not new: they date from the origin of sacerdotal confession; and it would be easy for us to bring forward analogous ones by examining the writings of a great number of Casuists, such as those of Cardinal Tolet, Fillicius, Tambourini, Emmanuel Sa, Escobar, Busenbaum, Molina, Toletanus, &c. The theory of cases of conscience has become, in the hands of these casuists, a very extensive and important branch of theology. If it required some genius to create this new science, just the contrary is expected from those who are charged with the application of it. In this matter we may trust to the evidence of the Jesuits, who say in their instructions—"If any one in the society be a simpleton, let him be called to the study of cases of conscience." *Inepti ad philosophiam, ad casuum studia destineantur.*\*

siderantur, magis concupiscentiam nata sunt movere; et ideo potest contingere, ut confessor talia quærens, et sibi et confidenti noceat, et sic quandoque deficiant in suo scrutinio, iniquitates scrutantes.—(S. Thomas, iv., sent., d. 19, in exposi. testu.)

\* *Ratio Studiorum*, p. 172.

The monks have, indeed, given proofs of their silliness and inquisitorial curiosity, by seeking out the most secret thoughts of the mind, and by publishing a book, which I myself saw in a college where I had the misfortune to be confined, put into the hands of the children called to make a general confession, at the time of their first communion. In that vile book, which contains some thousands of sins, children were made acquainted with things of which grown-up persons ought to remain ignorant all their lives. Each sin was printed on one side only of the leaf, cut into little slips which could be raised and folded to point out the sins of which any one might be guilty. This rare work, which I possess, is entitled "*La Confession Coupee*," or, "An Easy Method of Preparing for Particular and General Confessions; invented by the reverend father Saint Christopher Leuterbrever, a friar of the order of St. Francis; with a Treatise on the most Common Sins among Married People. (Paris: 1739.18mo.)"

We will conclude this chapter with the following passage, wherein Fleury acknowledges that the Casuists were not less pernicious to morality than to religion:—

"They have introduced two means of allowing sin to triumph; one, by excusing the greater number of sins, and the other, by facilitating abso-

lution. It is taking away sin—at least in the opinion of men—to teach them that what they believed to be sin is not so; this is what modern doctors have pretended to do, in their distinctions and scholastic subtleties, and especially in their doctrine of probability.

“With regard to sins which cannot be excused, the remedy is an easy absolution, without ever refusing or even deferring it, however frequent the backslidings may be. Thus, the sinner has an easy reckoning, and does whatever he pleases. Sometimes he is told that he sins indeed, but that the remedy is easy, and he may sin every day by confessing every day. Now, this facility seems necessary, in the countries of the inquisition, to the habitual sinner, who will not reform, yet dares not miss his paschal duty, for fear of being denounced, excommunicated, and, at the end of the year, declared suspected of heresy, and as such prosecuted by law;—accordingly, those are the countries in which the most unscrupulous Casuists have lived. This facility of getting absolution is, in some sort, the annihilation of sin; since it divests it of horror, and causes it to be considered as an ordinary and inevitable evil. Would people be afraid of the ague, if it could be cured by merely swallowing a glass of water? Or, would any one be afraid to rob or murder, if he could get off by washing his

hands? Confession is almost as easy when you have only to whisper a word in the ear of a priest, without fearing a postponement of absolution, without any painful expiation, or the necessity of missing the opportunity. But I am gradually straying from my subject: I will, however, add, that the new devotions introduced by certain religious brethren have contributed to the same effect—that is to say, of lessening the horror of sin, and of causing the correction of morals to be neglected. You may wear a scapulary, tell your beads, or say some famous prayer every day, without either forgiving your enemy, restoring ill-acquired wealth, or quitting your concubine. “These are the devotions in favour with the people—such as do not call upon them to improve.”

“Hence comes also the outward devotion to the Holy Sacrament. They would much rather adore it when exposed, or follow it in a procession, than prepare themselves to communicate worthily.”\*

\* Fleury, Discours sur l’ Histoire Eccl.. disc. viii., n. 14.

---

## CHAPTER II.

### ON THE IMMORALITY OF THE QUESTIONS ASKED IN CONFESSiON.

---

BEFORE auricular confession had been admitted into the churches of Christendom and declared sacramental by the Council of Latran, penitential interrogatory formulas had been drawn up for the use of confessors. These collections, in which sins then considered as mortal had been inserted, were imagined in order to remedy all kinds of abuses, introduced through the ignorance and gross superstition of the priests. But the evil, far from being lessened by this invention, was in several respects aggravated. For, with the idea that sins could be pardoned only after a special and circumstantial declaration—a condition which ignorance, negligence, fear, or other causes, pre-

vented from performing—formulas of interrogatories were drawn up for the use of confessors, in order to enable them to discover all the sins of which they who applied to them might be guilty. But with the view of discovering sins of which the penitents had not the slightest idea, they taught them the knowledge of them.

This manner of diving into the depths of the conscience has been put in practice according to the capability and inquisitiveness of the confessor. We find that the sins against the sixth (7th) commandment are specified in these “penitentials” with many more details than other kinds of offences, because they were very common at the time when this system of interrogatory was reduced to a formula. Thus, from the secrecy in which the evil is produced, two great causes of immorality have arisen: 1st, the knowledge of vice, given to those who were ignorant of it; and, 2ndly, an impulse by which both parties are urged towards a kind of passion into which human nature easily falls. What other effect can be expected from those unchaste conversations which, by exciting the imagination, inspire wishes which may be satisfied the more easily as the satisfaction may remain unknown to the public. Lastly, confessors are inclined to give full scope to their passions in the confessional, inasmuch as they find in every other

circumstance of their calling, obstacles which their vow of continency imposes upon them. Indeed, what is easier than to seduce a young person who is known to be susceptible, or one who, already corrupted, ever seizes the opportunity of satisfying her inclinations?—an opportunity which invites still more to crime, as both parties are certain that nothing will transpire between two guilty persons equally interested in keeping the secret.

The reader would be able to form an idea of these interrogatories from one of the penitential works composed at the end of the ninth century.\* They are remarkable records of the immorality, superstition, and profound ignorance which reigned in the middle ages among both the clergy and laity. They may be traced back to the commencement of the eighth century at least; since there existed a penitentiary in 731, of the name of Egbert, archbishop of York (*Eboracensis*). The reader would see what a false, absurd idea the clergy and laity had formed of the nature and gravity of sins. He would perceive that they attributed to ridiculous and stupid practices a culpability equal to that of the greatest crimes. We refrain from giving extracts, in order not to shock

\* *Codicum Manuscriptum Pœnitentiale.* Apud J. Morinum, *Commentarium Pœnitent,* *in fine*, p. 23 et seq.

that decency which they who composed them did not respect. The confessor is ordered to proceed, before commencing his interrogatory, with a few formulas and prayers; after which, he is told to make the penitent confess all his sins, by putting to him a series of disgusting questions: “*Tunc, fac eum confiteri omnia peccata sua.*”

The Church of the East, which, in the middle ages, was not less barbarous, ignorant, or superstitious than that of the West, had also drawn up penitential formulas for the use of confessors. We find therein a system no less immoral and absurd than the practices of the Churches of the West, as the reader may judge from a penitential composed by *Jean Jejunatus*, a patriarch of Constantinople. It is said to have been made public in the year 586, and it had, for a long time, a great vogue among the Greeks. We must remark that the Western Church has never admitted—neither does it give to priests—the faculty of knowing and judging of the culpability of sinners, any more than it gives the power of absolving and pardoning them. The penitential causes the following words to be addressed by the priest to those who, acknowledging and confessing their sins, pray to return to grace with God and to obtain his pardon: “O Lord, our God, who

art the father of all men, who perceivest every-  
thing, and dost pardon with bounty and affection  
all those who come unto Thee to do penance; who  
didst take compassion on David, when he acknow-  
ledged his sins (*per confessionem*), [here follow  
several other examples taken from the Scriptures,]  
thou supreme protector, listen to the prayers of  
thy humble servant, unworthy, on account of his  
numerous iniquities, to call upon thy holy name.  
According to thy abundant mercy, hearken to the  
sins of thy humble servant, N. (the priest here  
pronounces the name of the penitent), who con-  
fesses his sins unto Thee; receive thy servant,  
and if he has committed any sin, either volun-  
tarily or involuntarily, in thought, word, or deed,  
mercifully look upon him. For Thou alone hast  
the power of remitting sins; therefore we address  
our prayers to Thee, praying unto, glorifying, and  
praising Thee, together with the Son and the Holy  
Ghost," &c.

We will end with two passages from these  
penitentials, which prove the superstitious igno-  
rance of the persons who prescribed the formulas  
of confession: "Let married people observe con-  
tinence for forty days before Easter, and before  
the birthday of our Lord, and let a man cease to  
know his wife who has conceived, till three months

after parturition. Let a woman abstain from going to church for thirty days, if she has a boy ; and forty days, if she has a girl.\*

\* Codicu[m] Manuscriptu[m] Pœnitentiale. Apud J. Morinum, Commentarium Pœnitent., *in fine*, pag. 31.

---

### CHAPTER III.

#### SEDUCTION OF WOMEN IN SPAIN, BY MEANS OF CONFESSiON.

---

THE numerous instances of seduction that had occurred in the confessional, especially in Italy and Spain, had long been known to the court of Rome, by means of the reserved cases of certain sins, the knowledge of which it had claimed for itself, and which it alone could absolve. Thus, it was acquainted with the most secret actions and opinions, by means of a legion of monks, who had made themselves masters of the tribunal of confession, and by priests and bishops devoted to it by profession and private interest. But, fearing lest seduction—of rather frequent occurrence in the confessional—should furnish arms against that institution, and inspire many Catholics with aver-

sion, should such cases come to the knowledge of the public, the court of Rome believed that the Inquisition might be able, if not to put a stop to this debauchery, at least to confine it within bounds which the public eye could never penetrate, and that what was most important, scandal would thus be prevented without any violence being done to public opinion respecting the secular and regular clergy.

It was for this purpose that Paul IV. addressed to the inquisitors of Grenada, on the 18th of January, 1556, a brief, in which he said he had heard that a certain number of confessors abused their ministry, so far as to outrage the very confessional. Accordingly, the pope commanded those inquisitors to prosecute the priests whom the *public voice accused* of so great a crime, and to spare nobody.

The Inquisitors having communicated the letter of Paul IV. to the Archbishop of Grenada, the latter wrote to them that, in the circumstances in which they were then placed, the publication of the bull might be attended with inconveniences, if it were made in the usual forms, and that it was needful to act with discretion. The archbishop accordingly convoked the curates and other ecclesiastics, whilst the Inquisition acted in like manner towards the superiors of the different monas-

teries, and it was prescribed to both these bodies to give notice of the pope's brief to all the confessors, to desire them to behave with great prudence for the future, and to let the people remain ignorant of the papal bull, lest many persons should renounce confession. At the same time, an inquiry was instituted against the priests and monks whose conduct had caused them to be suspected, and they discovered among the latter a few guilty persons whom they were content to punish privately, giving no reason for this measure, in order to avoid scandal. "The Jesuits,"\* says Llorente, "were conspicuous in this affair: they would not give absolution to their penitents till after they had made them promise to denounce the crime to the Holy Office and to name the persons."

"The discoveries that were made," continues the same author, "proved to the pope that the abuse in question was not particular to the kingdom of Grenada, and that there was an urgent necessity to subject to the same law all the other provinces of the kingdom. On the 16th of April, 1561, he accordingly addressed to the Grand Inquisitor Valdez a bull, by which he authorised him to take proceedings against all the confessors in the kingdom

\* *Histoire Critique de l'inquisition d'Espagne.* Paris, 1818, 4 vols., 8°. This is the work that has furnished me with the materials of which the present chapter is composed.

and domains of Philip II., who had committed the crime of seduction, as if they were guilty of heresy. The measures taken on this occasion, no doubt, not appearing sufficient to remedy the evil, Pius IV. sent a new bull in 1564, which was successively followed by several others, in order to extirpate an evil that had taken deep root, not only in Spain, but also throughout Christendom, since one of these bulls contains the words, '*In illis Hispaniorum remotis, et in quibus vis Christi orbis partibus.*'"

An edict, published at Seville in 1563, gave rise to such numerous denunciations that the recorders of the Holy Office were no longer able to receive them, which necessitated a term of thirty days to be assigned to every female plaintiff to come forward a second time. As this postponement was followed by several others, it took no less than a hundred and twenty days to register all the denunciations. But the inquisitors, alarmed at this prodigious number of guilty persons, and the scandal which was occasioned, resolved to abandon their undertaking, and renounced the prosecution of the delinquents. Indeed, there were, in this vast crowd of females, some very respectable persons, nay, some of illustrious birth. Ashamed of all that had taken place, they used to disguise themselves and muffle up their heads, in order to repair to the

inquisitors, who occupied the castle of Triana, for fear of being met and recognised by their husbands. In spite of these precautions, several of the latter were informed of what was going on, and this affair was nearly occasioning a great disturbance.

The measures taken to put an end to the attempts of the confessors upon women having been of no avail, the council of the Holy-Office issued new orders in 1576, in order to provoke new denunciations. The popes published successively, in the years 1614, 1622, &c., bulls and decrees, the last of which was in these terms:—" You shall declare if you know, that any confessor, priest or friar—no matter of what rank—has, in the act of confession, either immediately, before, or after, on account or under pretence of confession, in the confessional or any other place, solicited, or endeavoured to solicit, women, by inviting or provoking them to shameful and dishonest actions, either with himself or any other person, or has had with them illicit and scandalous conversations; and we exhort the confessors, and command them to warn all such of their female penitents as may have been solicited in this manner, of the obligation imposed upon them to denounce the said suborners to the Holy-Office, to which the knowledge of this species of offence expressly belongs."

We see, from the order given to women to de-

clare the solicitations that might be made to them by their confessors to commit shameful and dishonest actions, not only with them, but also *with other persons*, that there were priests vile and infamous enough to serve as procurers, and to corrupt women, in behalf of persons from whom they expected pay or other advantage.

The opportunity of seducing a woman, the probability of success, and the attempts which follow, inherent in auricular confession, must happen in a pretty considerable number of instances; for, as Llorente observes, "a woman, almost always young and weak, gives, by the confession of the faults she has committed against the sixth (7th) precept in the Decalogue, the most frequent opportunity for the attempt of which the confessor becomes guilty." It would seem that the vice of corrupting women was so inherent in auricular confession in Spain, that, like the hundred-headed hydra, it ever grew up again of its own strength. For, indeed, the popes and the tribunal of the Holy-Office published bulls, ordinances, successive decrees, and even made, in 1727, an auto-da-fé, of which we shall speak, without being able to put an end to an evil pernicious to religion, and still more to good morals, tranquillity, the happiness of families, and to social order.

Nothing is more easy than to obtain everything

from weak, ignorant, or superstitious persons, who imagine themselves obliged to submit blindly to a corrupt priest, at whose knees they are prostrate. For this, it is sufficient that they should dread the excommunications, anathemas, and damnation with which they are menaced. Then, there are no secrets, however intimate they may be, but they can thus succeed in discovering them. Self-accusation becomes a virtue;—accordingly this is what happened in Spain. “For,” as Llorente says: “denunciations were never more frequent than when the paschal communion (Easter) was approaching, because the confessors made it a duty.” This movement, impressed upon the spirit of denunciation, was the effect of the mandates which were published in the churches during two Sundays in Lent: one imposed the obligation of denouncing within six days, upon pain of mortal sin and major excommunication, persons guilty of any case of seduction; the other declared that they also were smitten with the same anathema who had allowed this time to pass without presenting themselves to the tribunal, or making their declaration; and all the refractory were subjected to horrible canonical censures.

As the inquisitors showed themselves inexorable and cruel in their judgments against heretics, or even persons only suspected of heresy, in the

same degree did they prove indulgent towards the priests and monks who became guilty of the most infamous of crimes. Not to believe in the infallibility of the councils or in that of the popes, was, in their opinion, an offence to be expiated only by the flames of the stake; whereas hypocrisy, deceit, falsehood, nay, the name of God employed to seduce innocence and credulity, and entice to shameful debauchery, even to the pollution of the nuptial couch, were but trifling faults, which, in order to preserve the honour of the Church and that of the monks, deserved only some slight punishment. "For," as Llorente observes, "the policy of the Inquisitors in so delicate an affair, was extremely prudent and reserved, because they were afraid of furnishing the Lutherans with new arms against auricular confession, and the Catholics with a pretext for not having recourse to it so frequently."

According to the same author, proceedings against guilty priests were conducted in the same way as those against heretics: the accused was asked whether he believed his conduct to have been innocent; an affirmative answer caused him to be considered as a heretic; for he was then supposed not to believe in the sacrament of penitence; but if, on the contrary, he acknowledged himself to be guilty, he had nothing to fear. Almost all

who were denounced declared they believed they had committed a crime; but some they excused on the ground of human frailty, exposed to the greatest dangers, to the hearing of cases calculated to entice them to evil. Some there were who expected to justify themselves by saying—and on better grounds—that all other opportunities of sinning were denied to them.

The penalties inflicted upon prevaricating priests were—banishment from the town where they had committed the offence, from the place where the tribunal had sat that had condemned them, and from royal residences: they were, moreover, forbidden to hear confessions for the rest of their lives, and they were generally confined in a convent. “Yet, we see but too often,” says Llorente, “these same prevaricators contrive, by dint of prayers, promises, intrigues, and even hypocrisy, to get themselves reinstated by the Inquisition.” The homicidal history of the Inquisition does not present one single instance of a priest condemned to death, whatever might be the number and the quality of the women he had ruined.

The popes charged the Inquisition especially to make inquiries on this subject, and to punish the delinquents. Thus, in 1561, Pius IV. published a bull, dated the 16th of April, by which he authorized the Inquisition to seek out and punish

such priests and monks as, in confession, suborned females, and tried to make them the accomplices of their lubricity. It seems that this crime was rather frequent in Spain, for, this pope says, in his bull, that "he has lately learnt that there are several priests in Spain, charged with the cure of souls, who abuse the sacrament of penitence, in confession, by inviting, or invoking by seducing words, or by trying to seduce and provoke to dishonest actions the women who confess to them."\*

The prisons of the Inquisition were unable to put a stop to the evil. Clement VIII. thought fit, thirty years later, to prescribe to the Inquisition that they should proceed against the secular or regular priests who should solicit women. But the authority of two popes not having succeeded any better than that of the councils or the rigours of the Inquisition, a third pope, Gregory XV., issued, in 1612, a more precise and minute constitution to put an end to this kind of immorality. Not only does he confirm the bull of Pius IV.,

\* Se nuper accepisse diversos sacerdotes in regnis Hispaniarum, atque etiam in eorum civitatibus et direcessibus curam animarum habentes, sive eam pro aliis exerceentes, aut alios audiendis confessionibus deputatos, sacramento pœnitentiæ in actu audiendi confessiones abuti, mulieresque videlicet pœnitentes ad actus in honestos, dum earumdem audiunt confessiones, alliciendo et provocando, vel allicere et provocare tentando.

but he commands that it shall be inviolably observed throughout the Christian universe, and charges the Inquisition to punish very severely (*severissime puniantur*) every priest who, by any means, or in whatever place confession might be made, should solicit, provoke, or make any attempts to entice women, or any other persons (*Qui personas quæcunque illæ sint, ad in honesta solicitare*) to commit actions contrary to chastity.

Let us relate a few facts, not less authentic than the preceding, which are found recorded in the History of the Inquisition of Spain,\* by Llorente, a respectable ecclesiastic, who had had in his hands the *procès-verbaux* of the acts and judgments pronounced by the Inquisition, of which he was for a long time secretary. "A girl descended from a noble family, and born at Corello, in Navarre, took the veil in 1712, in a convent of Carmelites, of the city of Lerma. She passed more than twenty years in that convent, and her renown did but increase from the accounts of her extacies and miracles, adroitly spread abroad by friar Juan de Longas, the prior of Lerma, the provincial, and other friars of the first rank, who were all accomplices of the impos-

\* This fact is also quoted by Mr. Michelet. See *Priests, Women, and Families*, p. 132. Longman, London, 1845.—Transl.

ture of Mother Aguada, and interested in causing her imposture to be credited.

“ It was determined that a convent should be founded in her native place, and the superiors, of whom I have just spoken, named her foundress and prioress. There she continued her vicious manner of living, without losing the reputation she enjoyed, which, on the contrary, became greater every day; so that people flocked from all the neighbouring countries to implore her intercession with God, for the succour they needed.”

“ At length, after having passed her whole life in a thousand secret iniquities disguised under the mask of fasting and other outward signs of sanctity, Mother Aguada was denounced to the Holy-Office of Logroño, which ordered her to be confined in the secret prisons of that town, where she died in consequence of being put to the torture. She confessed, amid the torments which she was made to suffer, that her pretended sanctity had been only an imposture.”

The man who had principally seduced this girl, from her youth, into such an excess of corruption, fanaticism, and imposture, was a provincial monk, of the bare-legged Carmelites—an order that has become infamous by such deeds. His name was Juan de la Véga. “ He had been,” says Llorente, “ ever since 1715, the spiritual director and accom-

pliance of Mother Aguada; he was then thirty-five years old, and, according to the evidence at his trial, he had had five children by her. His conversation had corrupted other nuns, by making them believe that what he advised them to do was genuine virtue: he had written the life of his principal pupil, and spoke of her as a perfect model of sanctity. Therein he related a multitude of miracles, and everything that could serve his purpose: he himself acquired so great a reputation that he was named the "*Ecstatic.*" The monks who had been his accomplices, reported everywhere that, since Juan de la Cruz, there had not been any friar in Spain more devoted to penitence than he. He caused a likeness to be made of Mother Aguada, and had it placed in the choir of the church. Thereon might be read the four following lines of a double meaning, the substance of which was to this effect:

O Jesus! let, within my heart,  
A flower be planted by thy hand;  
The season will its fruit impart,  
For good and fertile is the land.

"Donna Vicenta de Loya, the niece of Mother Aguada, was received, in her ninth year, into the convent of Corella, when her aunt went thither to be prioress. The latter, assisted by the provincial, Juan de la Véga, taught her her own evil doc-

trine. Her lessons were so successful, and she performed such an infamous part when the provincial first seduced her niece, that it is not possible to lay before the reader such a revolting description: she acted in that way, she said, in order that the work might be more meritorious in the eyes of God. Donna Vicenta confessed all her sins as soon as she was arrested, without any torture being employed, and revealed those of the persons whom she knew to be guilty. She averred only, that she had never entertained in her soul any heretical error which she knew to be condemned by the Church; though she considered all she had done as lawful, because her confessors and her aunt had persuaded her so, and she had the highest opinion of the virtue of those persons, and particularly of her aunt, who was considered a saint. Donna Vicenta's sincerity procured her the favour of appearing at the auto-da-fé in a *San-Benito* scapulary, which was worn likewise by four other nuns who, even in torture, had denied having committed the crimes in question—excepting one, who avowed she had learned the evil doctrine ever since her childhood from Juan de Longas.

“I shall not stop,” says Llorente, “to relate all the details I find in my notes about the trials to which this affair gave rise,” &c.

Crimes such as those we have just related, committed by monks or nuns—sacred persons—were not, in the eyes of the inquisitors, of the same gravity as the mere suspicion of heresy. “This severity” (against suspected persons), says Llorente, “is the more shocking, as we see the inquisitors practising, at the same time, an extreme moderation, when there is any question about punishing the *prodigious number of infanticides* committed by the monks and nuns of Corella, the existence of which had been judicially proved. If the witnesses are to be believed, there had been more than twenty successful attempts to procure abortion, and more than thirty murders committed upon infants after their birth, several of which, according to the evidence of the witnesses, had not even been baptised. Other tribunals would not have failed to send to the scaffold all the individuals convicted of such horrible attempts, in order to terrify guilt; and yet it was in this very case—worthy of being signalised as unparalleled in the history of the inquisitors—that the Holy-Office displayed its graciousness and mercy, so often vaunted in its decrees.”\*

Llorente relates, moreover, the discovery of

\* Llorente, Histoire de l’Inquisition d’Espagne, t. iv., p. 33, *et seq.*

crimes of the same nature as those we have just narrated, which had taken place in another locality. "Among the trials," says he, "which I became acquainted with at Saragossa, I have discovered one which differs but little from that of Corella. It took place in 1727, against certain nuns of a place called Casbas, and Friar Manuel de Val, a Franciscan monk of the same institution. However, this trial does not present such crimes as infanticide, covenants with the devil, nor any such as inspire nature with horror; they are but acts of weakness, accompanied with attempts to conceal them from the knowledge of men."

It is evident, from Llorente's reserve, through fear of shocking decency, and because of his own opinion upon auricular confession, that crimes of this nature were extremely numerous in the convents, and that they were the inevitable consequences of confession. This fact is proved officially from the very acts of the inquisition, as Llorente's sincerity and honesty cannot be questioned in what we have quoted above, and in the following passages:—"Since the inquisition meddles with what passes in convents, it is surprising that, after so many irregularities of this kind, *with which its archives are filled*, but of which decency does not permit us to give an account, it has not resolved to deprive monks of the direction of the convents of

women.”\* He says also, in another place—“If the priests who are in the habit of confessing nuns saw the papers of the Holy-Office, they would very soon be disgusted with a ministry which they sometimes perform with such delight, because they are ignorant of the danger which threatens them.”

We will quote, moreover, the sentence of a Capuchin friar, related by Llorente, to prove that there are no means which the lewdness of perverse monks and priests cannot devise to seduce innocence and inexperience, and to abuse the confidence of young females. This Capuchin friar, who had performed in Spanish America the functions of apostolic missionary, provincial, and several times of guardian, corrupted a whole establishment of Béguines, and out of the seventeen women who composed this sort of community, he solicited thirteen. The system of defence he employed is very curious:—

It appeared from his trial that, being the spiritual director and confessor of all the women in that house, he passed for a saintly man in the opinion of everybody: he had inspired them with so much confidence in his doctrine as confessor, that he was regarded as an oracle from heaven.

\* Llorente. Hist. de l’Inquisition d’Espagne, t. iv., p. 33, *et seq.*

When he perceived that everybody cherished his opinion, he began to give thirteen of these blessed nuns to understand, in the very act of confession, that he had received an especial and very singular grace from God. "Our Lord Jesus Christ," said he to them, "has been bountiful enough to appear to me in the consecrated wafer, at the moment of the elevation, and to say: 'Almost all the souls thou directest in this house are pleasant to me, because they entertain a true love for virtue, and endeavour to advance towards perfection; but especially such a one (*here he named the person to whom he was speaking*): her soul is so perfect, that she has already conquered all worldly affections, excepting one, which torments her exceedingly, because the enemy of the flesh is very potent on account of her youth, strength, and natural graces: for this reason, in order to reward her virtue, and that she may be perfectly united to my love, and serve me with a calmness which she does not enjoy, but to which by her virtues she is entitled, I charge thee to grant her, in my name, the dispensation she requires for her tranquillity, by telling her she may satisfy her passion, provided it be expressly with thee; and—to avoid all scandal—let her observe the strictest secrecy upon this subject with everybody, without ever speaking of it even to another confessor; because

she will not sin, having a dispensation in the precept which I grant her on this condition, for the holy purpose of putting an end to all her uneasiness, and that she may advance every day further in the path of holiness.’”

Among these seventeen women, there were four to whom the Capuchin did not think proper to impart his revelation, three being advanced in years, and the fourth very ugly. He, doubtless, thought that a seraglio of thirteen ought to be sufficient; and he imagined he was very moderate when comparing himself to David, whom God had allowed to possess a far greater number. The youngest of these girls having fallen ill, was determined to confess to another priest. The latter went and revealed all he had heard from the confession of the patient, fearing that the same doings had happened with other nuns. When the young girl had recovered her health, she related candidly what had passed to the Inquisition of Carthagena, and she added “that she had never believed in the truth of the revelation during the three years that this intercourse had lasted with her director; but that she had pretended to believe what he said, yielding unblushingly to his lubricity, under the mask of piety.” The Inquisition discovered that the same conduct had been practised towards the twelve other saints, who were not so sincere as

the former: they, however, confessed the facts, after having denied them, and pleaded in excuse that they had believed in the revelation. They were removed into different convents, and the youngest was sent back to her family.

"As to the confessor," says Llorente, "the Inquisition thought it would be a serious inconvenience to arrest and immure him in their secret prisons, because the public would not fail to believe that his affair was connected with the dispersion of so large a number of saints, forced to become nuns in spite of themselves, without the Inquisition having seemed to interfere. Therefore, they merely shipped him to Spain, where he was put in a convent at Madrid. At first, he answered the questions put to him by the inquisitors, by prevaricating in various ways; at length, he admitted all that had passed, when he was made acquainted with the depositions; but he had the impudence to maintain that he had really had the revelation of which he had spoken to the saints. They pointed out to him that it was incredible that Jesus Christ had appeared to him in the consecrated wafer, and dispensed him from one of the first negative precepts in the Decalogue, which binds for ever and ever. He replied that such also was the fifth (6th); but that God had dispensed Abraham from it, when an angel

had commanded him to kill his son ; that the same must be said of the seventh (8th), since he had permitted the Hebrews to steal the property of the Egyptians. They made him observe that the facts he alleged were mysteries for the benefit of religion. He answered that God, by the revelation he had made to him, had purposed to tranquillize the consciences of thirteen virtuous souls, and to lead them to a perfect union with his divine essence. They then remarked to him that it was very singular so great a virtue should happen to be found in the thirteen young and beautiful girls, and not at all in the three old ones, or in the ugly one. He replied to that with assurance, by quoting the Scriptures : ‘The Holy Spirit breathes wherever it will.’”

The confessor, after having firmly maintained the truth of the vision in his answers to several interrogatories, fearing lest this deceit should damage his cause, retracted, and avowed that he had departed from the truth, that he was guilty, that he repented and demanded pardon and a penance. “I blinded and betrayed myself,” said he, “by considering as certain the apparition of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and the dispensation of the sixth (7th) commandment of the Decalogue, since I ought to have seen that it was only a pure illusion, and to have believed myself un-

worthy of so great a favour. My fault is, like that of the Jews who crucified Jesus Christ, one of involuntary ignorance." Lastly, after all these shifts, and when other pressing questions had been put to him, the prisoner said: "I have lied and perjured myself throughout; write down anything you please, and I will sign it."

The affair having thus ended, the monk who had corrupted thirteen unfortunate girls, and made them the instruments of his vile passions, was condemned only to make an abjuration, to be confined for five years in a convent of his own order, to be deprived for ever of his power of confessing and preaching, and to do several penances accompanied with strict fasting. He was, moreover, scourged by all the monks and lay brethren of the convent, in presence of a secretary of the inquisition. The convict inquired whether he might be allowed to pass the five years of his captivity in the prisons of the Holy-Office, instead of being confined in a convent. This demand surprised the inquisitors, who represented to him that he would be more comfortable among the brethren of his own order, who would try to console him in his affliction. He replied: "As I have been a provincial and a guardian, I know better than you the treatment that they who have been guilty like me have to suffer from the monks: it will cost me my life." Ac-

cordingly, his request having been refused, he died in the third year of his seclusion.

We think it right to add to what has been said in this chapter, the history of two law-suits for seduction: one, at Grenada, against the Jesuit Barthelemi des Bois, and the other against the Jesuit Meno at Valladolid. We borrow the narrative of these two trials from the *Causes Célèbres*.\*

“The college of Jesuits of Grenada had property,” says this author, “in a place called Caparacena, two leagues from Grenada, the administration of which they entrusted to friar Barthelemi des Bois. This friar having conceived a passion for a woman of that place, took the precaution of employing her husband in the cultivation of the lands, and even doubled his wages, in order to keep him busily engaged in the fields, so that he (the friar) might have entire freedom in the house with his wife, whom he managed to seduce. The husband, who, in spite of the doubling of his wages, felt some symptoms of jealousy, resolved to break off this intrigue; but the thing appeared difficult; the woman was not averse to the friar, and the latter was in love with her. One day, the friar having arrived from Grenada to see his mistress, and imagining the husband was occupied in the fields, alighted at once at her house. The husband, who

\* *Causes Célèbres*, par Richter, t. ii., p. 374.

had probably been informed of his intended visit, and had concealed himself in the house, managed to surprise them, and poniarded the friar. As this action on the part of a husband is, in such a case, justifiable by law, which excuses an instinctive act prompted by the loss of honour, this man stated, in a procedure in the regular form, that the friar had a criminal conversation with his wife, and that it had been from an actual knowledge of the fact that he had killed him. As soon as the rector of Grenada heard of this, he preferred a complaint for the murder of the Jesuit. By dint of threats, promises, and presents, almost all the witnesses heard on the husband's side were made to retract, and, by means of new ones whom they caused to be heard, they proved, on the one hand, that this woman was already aged, to make it appear that she was too old, and thus remove every suspicion of anything wrong, though, in fact, she was only twenty-eight; and, on the other hand, they proved that the friar was a saint, and that he had always his chapelet in his hand. The witnesses who still charged him with the crime were rejected, without even the trouble being taken to object to them judicially; in a word, the affair was managed in such a manner that the poor husband was condemned to be hanged, and

for the honour and towards the pious memory of the chaste and saintly friar and the society, the Jesuits caused the information, thus purged, to be printed, together with the definitive judgment.

Father Mena was a Jesuit who appeared to have great exterior endowments: he would make fine exhortations, and was ever speaking of God and eternity: he was thin and pale, with hollow eyes; his dress was thread-bare, and he wore a large chapelet. This Jesuit used to confess a young simple girl at Salamanca. One day he said to her that God had revealed to him that he wished them to live together as man and wife; but that it must remain an inviolable secret. The innocent girl did not immediately fall into the snare, but consulted the doctors of the university. Father Mena, who had foreseen this, had been beforehand with her. He gave them notice that he had a very scrupulous devotee, who wanted to consult them about trifles; that it was useless for them to give themselves the trouble of listening to these idle details, and that they were to tell her simply that she had only to follow blindly his advice. The reputation of sanctity enjoyed by the good father removed all suspicion from the minds of the doctors; and, without any misgiving, they

acted conformably to the line of conduct he had prescribed. The devotee was, therefore, convinced that such was the will of Heaven, and she married her confessor. He did not interrupt his usual duties, but continued to say mass, to confess, to live with every outward appearance of piety, and to make edifying exhortations. However, he had several children by his wife, whom he kept shut up in a lonely spot, but near at hand.

The Inquisition was at length informed of what was going on. Father Mena was put into the prisons of Valladolid. This event made the more noise, as his reputation was more widely known and better established. The society undertook his defence; physicians certified that he was ill; and permission was obtained to transfer him to the college to cure him, under the care of the officers of the Inquisition. It was impossible to mend a business so barefaced and so well proved: they had recourse to artifice. They pretended that Father Mena was dead; they made a figure of a body with pieces of wood, to which they added a face and hands of pasteboard; they then dressed up the whole in the garb of a Jesuit, and placed it upon a bier; the bells were tolled, and every ceremony gone through for the burial of this effigy. Meanwhile, the real Father Mena, mounted upon

260 CONFESSiON IN ITS RELATION TO MORALITY.

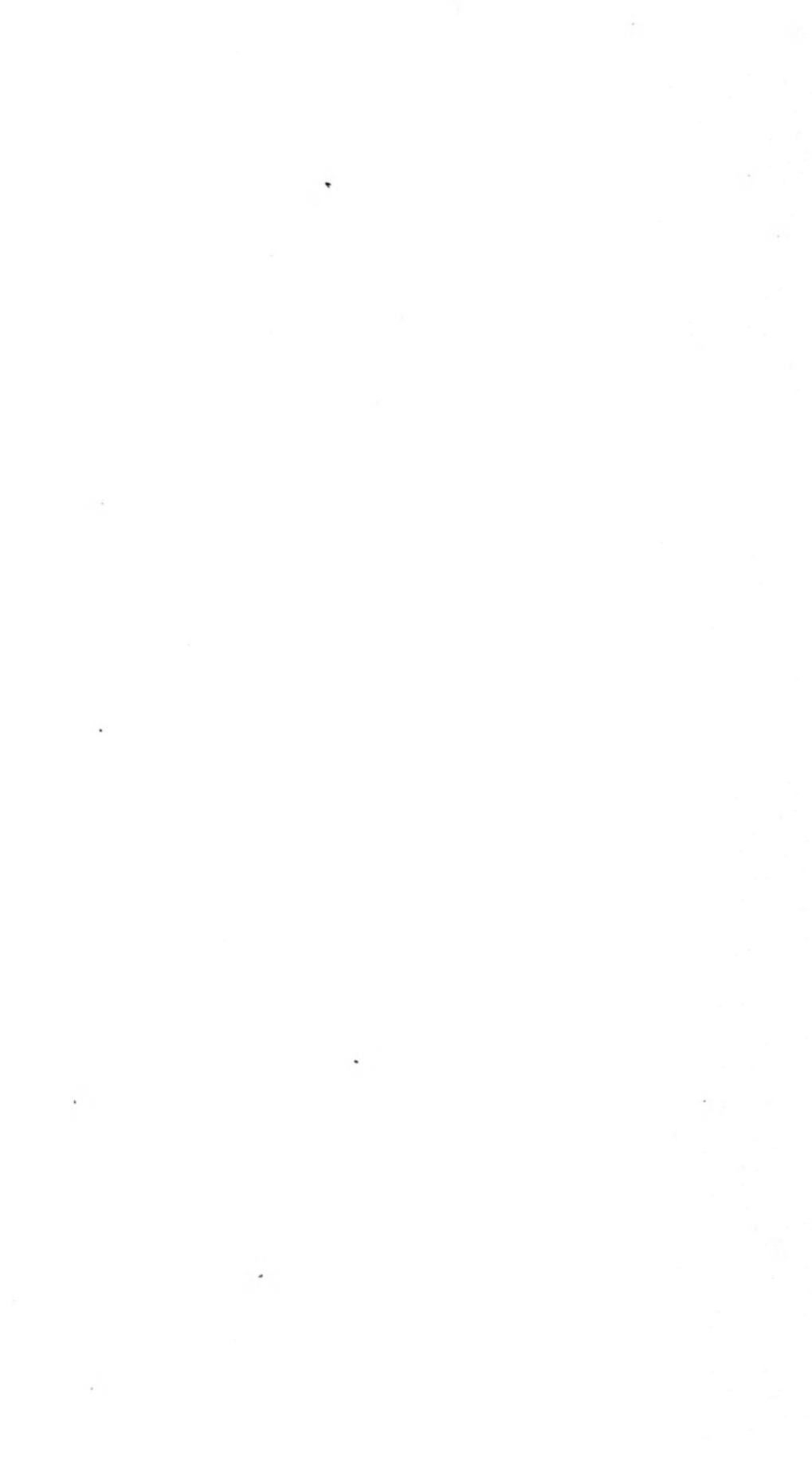
a mule, departed, and never stopped till he reached Genoa, where he began publicly teaching the law of Moses to the Jews. Thus it was that this Jesuit escaped from human justice.

END OF VOL. I.











BX  
2267  
L3  
v. 1

THE LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

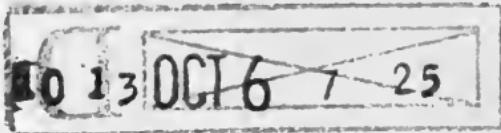
Santa Barbara  
Goleta, California

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE  
STAMPED BELOW.

AVAILABLE FOR  
CIRCULATION AFTER  
DISPLAY PERIOD



JAN 3 1961



20m-3-'59 (A552s4)476

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 001 030 785 8

